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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

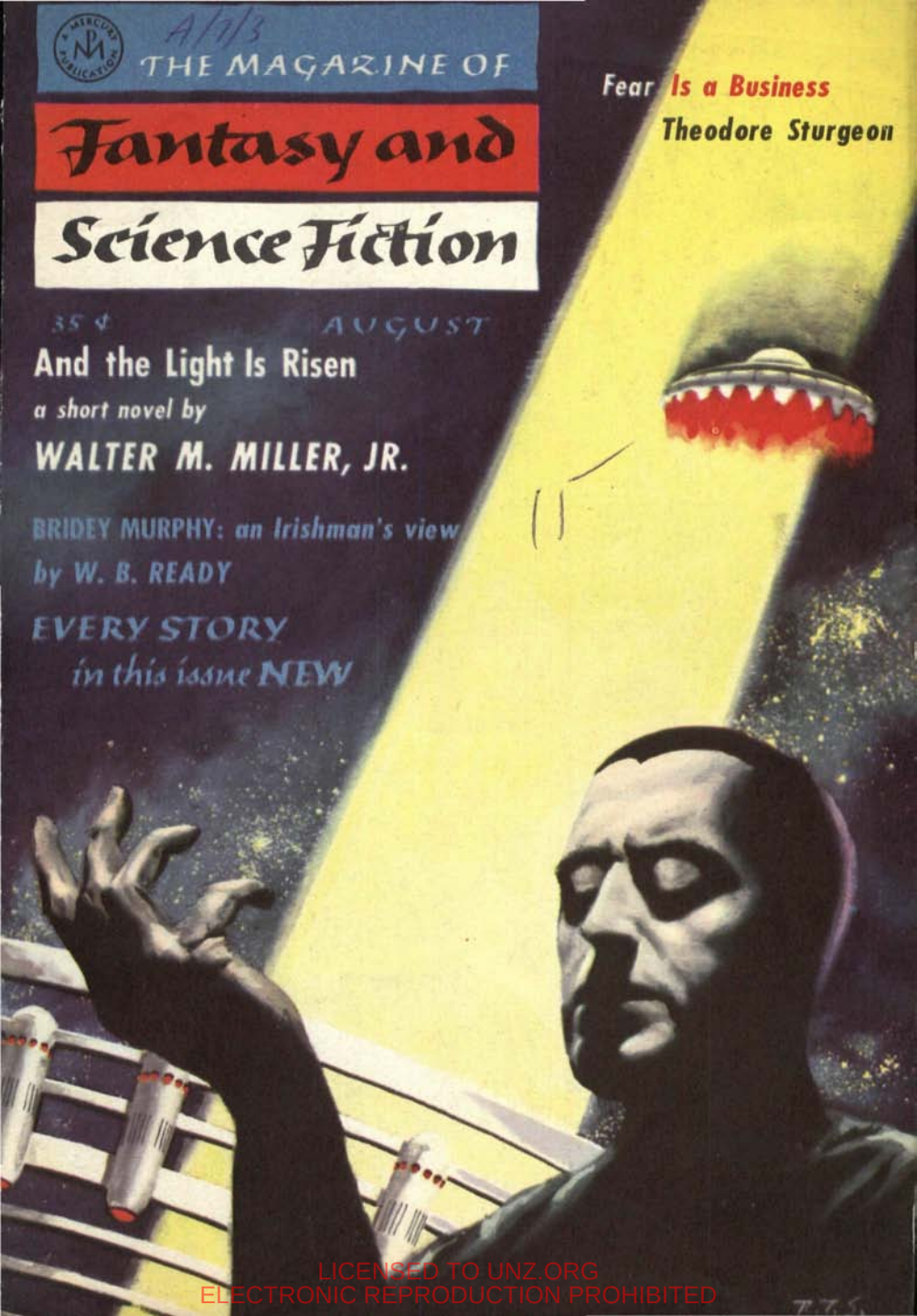
35¢ AUGUST

And the Light Is Risen
a short novel by
WALTER M. MILLER, JR.

BRIDEY MURPHY: *an Irishman's view*
by **W. B. READY**

EVERY STORY in this issue **NEW**

Fear Is a Business
Theodore Sturgeon



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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 11, No. 2 AUGUST

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COVER PAINTING BY DICK SHELTON

(*Illustrating "Fear Is a Business"*)

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 11, No. 2, Whole No. 63, AUGUST, 1956. Published monthly by Fantasy House, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, $4.00 in U. S. and Possessions; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. General offices: 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Editorial office, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H. under the Act of March 3, 1897. Printed in U. S. A. © *1956 by Fantasy House, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

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The writings of Walter Miller, it has been said by Judith Merril, are "characterized by a unique personal blend of mystic-poetic intensity and hard-headed practicality"; and something of the same blend characterizes the monks of the Albertian Order of St. Leibowitz. You first met this Order in Miller's half-humorous, half-tender A Canticle for Leibowitz *(F&SF, April, 1955; reprinted in* THE BEST FROM F&SF: FIFTH SERIES*), in which you saw the monks struggling, in the midst of the post-atomic Dark Ages, to keep a glimmer of knowledge aglow for a generation still to come. Now, in this new short novel, it is half a millennium later, and that generation of the Renaissance has arrived: it is time for the Albertians, as stewards of knowledge, to render an account of their stewardship. The situation is a delicate one, and enables Miller to explore many depths of the minds and souls of men, in a rich story of the re-creation of electricity, the politics and wars of a feudal state, and the manifold aspects of the conflict (in which there is no simple Right Side) between mystic and pragmatic viewpoints — all told with, to quote Merril again, "Mr. Miller's brand of bitter faith and grim optimism." F&SF does not, as a usual thing, devote so much of an issue to a single story: but occasionally a writer hits upon an idea which demands length and scope, and yet does not break easily for serialization. These long one-shots seem to have an impact all their own: remember Miss Merril's* PROJECT NURSEMAID? *J. T. McIntosh's* ONE TOO MANY? *Ward Moore's* BRING THE JUBILEE? *I think you'll also long remember*

And the Light Is Risen

by WALTER M MILLER, JR.

THERE WAS GOING TO BE A WAR. Marcus Apollo became certain of war's imminence the moment he overheard Hannegan's third wife tell a serving maid that her favorite courtier had returned with his skin intact from a mission to the tents of Mad Bear's clan. The fact that he had come back alive from the nomad encampment meant that a war was brewing. Purportedly, the emissary's mission had been to tell the Plains tribes that the civilized states had entered into the Agreement of the Holy Scourge concerning the disputed lands, and would

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hereafter wreak stern vengeance on the nomadic peoples and bandit groups for any further raiding activities. But no man carried such news to Mad Bear and came back alive. Therefore, Apollo concluded, the ultimatum had not been delivered, and Hannegan's emissary had gone out to the Plains with an ulterior purpose. And the purpose was all too clear.

Apollo picked his way politely through the small throng of guests, his sharp eyes searching out Brother Claret and trying to attract his glance. Apollo's tall figure and severe black cassock with a small flash of color at the waist to denote his rank stood out sharply in contrast with the kaleidoscope whirl of color worn by others in the banquet hall, and he was not long in catching his clerk's eye and nodding him toward the table of refreshments which was now reduced to a litter of scraps, greasy cups, and a few roast squabs that looked overcooked. Apollo dragged at the dregs of the punch bowl with the ladle, observed a dead roach floating among the spices, and thoughtfully handed the first cup to Brother Claret as the clerk approached.

"Thank you, Father," said Claret, not noticing the roach. "You wanted to see me?"

"As soon as the reception's over. In my quarters. Sarkal came back alive."

"Oh."

"I've never heard a more ominous 'oh'. I take it you understand the interesting implications?"

"Certainly, Father. It means the Agreement was a fraud on Hannegan's part, and he intends to use it against —"

"Shhh. Later." Apollo's eyes signaled the approach of an audience, and the clerk turned to refill his cup from the punch bowl. His interest became suddenly absorbed there, and he did not look at the lean figure in gray watered silk who strode toward them from the direction of the entrance. Apollo smiled formally and bowed. Their handclasp was brief and noticeably chilly.

"Well, Don Thaddeo," said the priest, "your presence surprises me. I thought you shunned such festive gatherings. Now what could be so special about this one to attract such a distinguished scholar?" He lifted his brows in mock perplexity.

"You're the attraction, of course," said the newcomer, matching Apollo's sarcasm, "and my only reason for attending at all."

"*I?*" He feigned surprise, but the assertion was probably true. The wedding reception of a half-sister was not the sort of thing that would impel Don Thaddeo to bedeck himself in formal finery and leave the cloistered halls of the academy.

"As a matter of fact, I've been looking for you all day. They told me you'd be here. Otherwise . . ." He looked around the banquet hall and snorted irritably.

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The snort cut whatever thread of fascination was tying Brother Claret's gaze to the punch bowl, and he turned to bow to the don. "Care for punch, Don Thaddeo?" he asked, offering a full cup.

The scholar accepted it with a nod and drained it. "I wanted to ask you a little more about the Leibowitzian documents we discussed," he said to Marcus Apollo. "I had a letter from a fellow named Kornhoer at the abbey. He assured me they have writings that date back to the last years of the Europan-American civilization."

If the fact that the priest had assured the scholar of the same thing several months ago was irritating to Apollo, his expression gave no hint of it. "Yes," he said. "They're quite authentic, I'm told."

"If so, it strikes me as very mysterious that nobody's heard — but never mind that. Kornhoer listed a number of documents and texts they claim to have and described them. If they exist at all, I've got to see them."

"Oh?"

"Yes. If it's a hoax, it should be found out, and if it isn't, the data might well be priceless."

The monsignor frowned. "I assure you there is no hoax," he said stiffly.

"The letter contained an invitation to visit the abbey and study the documents. They've evidently heard of me."

"Not necessarily," said Apollo, unable to resist the opportunity. "They aren't particular about who reads their books, as long as he washes his hands and doesn't deface their property."

The scholar glowered. The suggestion that there might exist literate persons who had never heard his name did not please him in the least.

"But there, then!" Apollo went on affably. "You have no problem. Accept their invitation, go to the abbey, study their relics. They'll make you welcome."

The scholar huffed irritably at the thought. "And travel hundreds of miles through bandit country at a time when Mad Bear's clan is —" Don Thaddeo broke off abruptly.

"You were saying?" Apollo prompted, his face showing no special alertness. A vein in his temple began to throb as he stared expectantly at Don Thaddeo.

"Only that it's a long dangerous trip, and I can't spare six months' absence from the academy. I wanted to discuss the possibility of sending a well armed party of the Mayor's guardsmen to fetch the documents here for study."

Apollo choked. He felt a childish impulse to kick the don in the shins and break the punch bowl over his head.

"I'm afraid," he said politely, "that would be quite impossible. But in any case, the matter is outside my sphere, and I'm afraid I can't be of any help to you."

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"Why not?" Don Thaddeo demanded. "Aren't you the Vatican's nuncio to the court of Hannegan?"

"Precisely. I represent the Vatican, not the cloistered orders. The government of an abbey is in the hands of its abbot, and such a decision would be made at the abbey, not at New Rome."

"But with a little pressure from New Rome . . ."

The impulse to kick shins surged swiftly. "We'd better discuss it later," Apollo said curtly. "This evening in my study, if you like." He half turned away, and looked back inquiringly as if to say *well?*

"I'll be there," the scholar said sharply, and marched away.

"Why didn't you tell him *no*, flatly, then and there?" Brother Claret fumed when they were alone in the embassy suite an hour later. "Transport priceless relics through bandit country in these times? It's unthinkable, Father."

"Certainly."

"Then why . . . ?"

"Two reasons. First, he's Hannegan's kinsman, and influential at that, and we have to be courteous to Caesar and his clan whether we like him or not. Second, he started to say something about the Mad Bear clan, and then broke off without finishing. I think he knows what's about to happen. I'm not going to engage in espionage, but if he volunteers any details, there's nothing to prevent our including them in the report you're about to deliver personally at New Rome."

"*I!*" The clerk looked shocked. "At New Rome . . . ? But what —"

"Not so loud," the nuncio grunted, glancing at the door. "I'm going to have to send my estimate of this situation to His Holiness, and quickly. But it's the kind of thing that one doesn't dare put in writing. If Hannegan's people intercepted such a dispatch, you and I would probably be found floating face down in the Red River. If Hannegan's enemies got hold of it, Hannegan would probably feel justified in hanging us publicly as spies. Martyrdom is all very well, but we have a job to do first."

"And I'm to deliver the report orally at the Vatican?" the clerk muttered, apparently not relishing the prospect of crossing hostile country.

"It has to be that way. Don Thaddeo may, just possibly may, give us an excuse for your leaving abruptly. In case there are any suspicions around Hannegan's court. Don Thaddeo may give us a reason to send you rushing off to Saint Leibowitz abbey, or New Rome, or both. I'll try to steer it that way."

"And the substance of the report I'm to deliver, Father?"

"That Hannegan's ambition to unite the continent under one dynasty isn't so wild a dream as we thought. That the Agreement of the Holy Scourge is probably a fraud

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by Hannegan, and that he means to use it to get both Denver and the Laredan Nation into conflict with the Plains nomads. If Laredan forces are tied up in a running battle with Mad Bear's people, it wouldn't take much encouragement to goad Coahuila into attacking Laredo from the south. After all, there's an old enmity there. Hannegan, of course, can then march victoriously to Rio Grande on the pretense of rescuing Laredo. With Laredo under his thumb, he can look forward to tackling both Denver and the Mississippi Republic without worrying about a stab in the back from the south."

"Do you think Hannegan can swing it, Father?"

Marcus Apollo started to answer, then closed his mouth slowly. He walked to the window and stared out at the sunlit city, a sprawling city built mostly of rubble from another age. A city without orderly patterns of streets. It had grown slowly over an ancient ruin, as perhaps someday another city would grow over the ruin of this one.

"I don't know," he said softly. "In these times, it's hard to condemn any man for wanting to unite this butchered continent. Even by such means as . . . but no, I don't mean that." He sighed heavily. "In any case, our interests are not the interests of politics. We should forewarn New Rome of what may be coming, because the Church will be affected by it, whatever happens. And that way, we may be able to keep out of the squabble."

"You really think so?"

"Of course not!" the priest said gently.

Don Thaddeo Pfardentrott arrived at Marcus Apollo's study as early as the time of day could be construed as evening, and his manner had noticeably changed since the reception. He managed a cordial smile, and there was nervous eagerness in the way he spoke. This fellow, thought Marcus Apollo, is after something he wants rather badly, and he's even willing to be decent in order to get it. Perhaps the list of ancient writings supplied by the monks at the Leibowitzian abbey had impressed the don more than he wanted to admit. The nuncio had been prepared for a fencing match, but the scholar's evident excitement made him too easy a victim, and Apollo relaxed his readiness for verbal dueling.

"This afternoon there was a meeting of the faculty of the collegium," said Don Thaddeo as soon as they were seated. "We talked about Brother Kornhoer's letter, and the list of documents." He paused as if uncertain of an approach. The gray dusklight from the large arched window on his left made his face seem blanched and intense, and his wide gray eyes searched at the priest as if measuring him and making estimates.

"I take it there was skepticism?"

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The gray eyes fell momentarily, then came up quickly. "Shall I be polite?"

"Don't bother," Apollo chuckled.

"There was skepticism. 'Incredulity' is more nearly the word. My own feeling is that if such papers exist, they are probably forgeries dating back several centuries. I doubt if the present monks at the abbey are trying to perpetrate a hoax. Naturally, they would believe the documents valid."

"Kind of you to absolve them," Apollo said sourly.

"I offered to be polite. Shall I?"

"No. Go on."

The don slid out of his chair and went to sit in the window. He gazed at the fading yellow patches of cloud in the west and pounded softly on the sill while he spoke. "The papers. No matter what we may believe of them, the idea that such documents may still exist intact — that there's even a slightest chance of their existing — is, well, so *arousing* a thought that we *must* investigate them immediately."

"Very well," said Apollo, a little amused. "They invited you. But tell me: what do you find so arousing about it?"

The scholar shot him a quick glance. "Are you acquainted with my work?"

The monsignor hesitated. He was acquainted with it, but admitting the acquaintance might force him to admit to an awareness that Don Thaddeo's name was being spoken in the same breath with names of natural philosophers dead a thousand years and more, while the don was scarcely in his thirties. The priest was not eager to admit knowing that this young scientist showed promise of becoming one of those rare outcroppings of human genius that appear only a time or two every century to revolutionize an entire field of thought in one vast sweep. He coughed apologetically.

"I must admit that I haven't read a great deal of . . ."

"Never mind." Don Thaddeo waved off the apology. "Most of it is highly abstract, and tedious to the layman. Theories of electrical essence. Planetary motion. Attracting bodies. Matters of that sort. Now Kornhoer's list mentions such names as Laplace, Maxwell, and Einstein — do they mean anything to you?"

"Not much. History mentions them as natural philosophers, doesn't it? From before the collapse of the last civilization. And I think they're named in one of the pagan hagiologies, aren't they?"

The scholar nodded. "And that's all anyone knows about them, or what they did. Physicists, according to our not-so-reliable historians. Responsible for the rapid rise of the Europan-American culture, they say. Historians list nothing but trivia. I had nearly forgotten them. But Kornhoer's descriptions of the old documents he says they have are descriptions of papers that might well be taken from physical science

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texts of some kind. It's just impossible!"

"But you have to make certain."

"We have to make certain. Now that it's come up. I wish I had never heard of it."

"Why?"

Don Thaddeo was peering at something in the street below. He beckoned to the priest. "Come here a moment. I'll show you why."

Apollo slipped from behind the desk and looked down at the muddy rutted street beyond the wall that encircled the palace and barracks and buildings of the academy, cutting off the Mayoral sanctuary from the seething plebeian city. The scholar was pointing at the shadowy figure of a peasant leading a donkey homeward at twilight. His feet were wrapped in sackcloth, and the mud had caked about them in great wads so that he seemed scarcely able to lift them. But he trudged ahead in one slogging step after another, resting half a second between footfalls. He seemed too mindless or too weary to scrape off the mud.

"He doesn't ride the donkey," theorized Don Thaddeo, "because this morning the donkey was loaded down with corn. It doesn't occur to him that the packs are empty now. What is good enough for the morning is also good enough for the afternoon."

"You know him?"

"He passes under my window too. Every morning and evening. Hadn't you noticed him?"

"A thousand like him."

"Look. Can you bring yourself to believe that that brute is the lineal descendent of men who supposedly invented machines that flew, who traveled to the moon, harnessed the forces of nature, built machines that could talk and seemed to think? Can you believe it?"

Apollo was silent.

"Look at him!" the scholar persisted. "No, but it's too dark now. You can't see the syphilis outbreaking on his neck, the way the bridge of his nose is being eaten away. Paresis. But he was undoubtedly a moron to begin with. Illiterate, superstitious, murderous. He diseases his children. For a few coins he would kill them. He will sell them anyway, when they are old enough to be useful. Look at him, and tell me if you see the progeny of a once mighty civilization? What *do* you see?"

"The image of Christ," grated the monsignor, surprised at his own sudden anger. "What did you expect me to see?"

The scholar huffed impatiently. "The incongruity. Men as you can observe them through any window, and men as historians would have us believe men once were. I can't accept it. How can a great and wise civilization have destroyed itself so completely?"

"Perhaps," said Apollo, "by being materially great and materially wise, and nothing else." He went to light a tallow lamp, for the twilight was

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rapidly fading into night. He struck steel and flint until the spark caught and he blew gently at it in the tinder.

"Perhaps," said Don Thaddeo, "but I doubt it."

"You reject all history, then, as myth?" A flame edged out from the spark.

"Not 'reject.' But it must be questioned. Who wrote our histories?"

"The monastic orders, of course. During the darkest centuries, there was no one else to record them." He transferred flame to the wick.

"There! You have it. And during the time of the anti-popes, how many schismatic orders were fabricating their own versions of things, and passing off their versions as the work of earlier men? You can't know, you can't really know. That there was on this continent a more advanced civilization than we have now — that can't be denied. You can look at the rubble and the rotted metal and know it. You can dig under a strip of blown sand and find their broken roadways. But twelve centuries of peasants have used up any evidence there might have been of the kind of machines the historians tell us they had in those days. Where are the remains of self-moving carts, of flying machines?"

Beaten into plowshares and hoes.

"*If* they existed."

"If you doubt it, why bother studying the Leibowitzian documents?"

"Because a doubt is not a denial. Doubt is a powerful tool, and it should be applied to history."

The nuncio smiled tightly. "And what do you want *me* to do about it, learned Don?"

The scholar leaned forward earnestly. "Write to the abbot of this place. Assure him that the documents will be treated with utmost care, and will be returned after we have completely examined them for authenticity and studied their content."

"Whose assurance do you want me to give him — yours or mine?"

"Hannegan's, yours, *and* mine."

"I can give him only yours and Hannegan's. I have no troops of my own."

The scholar reddened.

"Tell me," the nuncio added hastily, "why — besides bandits — do you insist you must see them here, instead of going to the abbey?"

"The best reason you can give the abbot is that if the documents are authentic, but *if* we had to examine them at the abbey, a confirmation wouldn't mean much to other secular scholars."

"You mean your colleagues might think the monks had tricked you into something?"

"Ummm, that might be implied. But also important, if they're brought here, they can be examined by everyone in the academy who's qualified to form an opinion. And any visiting dons from other principalities can have a look at them too.

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But we can't move the entire academy over to the southwest desert for six months."

"I see your point."

"Will you send the request to the abbey?"

"Yes."

The scholar appeared surprised.

"But it will be your request, not mine. And it's only fair to tell you that I don't think Father Jerome will say yes."

The don, however, appeared to be satisfied. When he was gone, the nuncio summoned his clerk.

"You'll be leaving for New Rome tomorrow," he told him.

"By way of Leibowitz Abbey?"

"Come back by way of it. The report to New Rome is urgent."

"Yes, Father."

"At the abbey, tell Father Jerome that Sheba expects Solomon to come to *her*. Bearing gifts. Then you better cover your ears. When he finishes exploding, hurry back so I can tell Don Thaddeo 'no.' "

II

Time seeps slowly on the desert, but there is little change to mark its passage, and only the buzzards who thrive on its carrion seem to notice that it goes by at all. Two seasons had passed since Father Jerome had barked a negative to the request from across the Plains, but the matter had been settled only a few weeks ago. Or had it been settled at all? Texarkana was obviously unhappy with the results.

The abbot paced along the abbey walls at sundown, his jaw thrust ahead like a whiskery old crag against possible breakers out of the sea of events. His thinning hair fluttered in white pennants on the desert wind, and the wind wrapped his robes bandage-tight about his stooped body, making him look like an emaciated Ezekiel with a strangely round little paunch. He thrust his gnarled hands into the sleeves of his robe and glowered occasionally across the desert toward the village of Sanly Bowitts in the distance. The red sunlight threw his wandering shadow across the courtyard, and the monks who encountered it in crossing the grounds glanced up wonderingly at the old man. Their ruler had seemed moody of late, and given to strange forebodings. It was whispered that the time was soon coming when a new abbot would be appointed ruler over the Albertian Brothers of Leibowitz. It was whispered that the old man was not well, not well at all. It was whispered that if the abbot heard the whispers, the whisperers should speedily commit their souls to God because their carcasses would belong to the abbot. The abbot had heard, but it pleased him for once not to notice; for the whispers were true.

"Read it to me again," he said abruptly to the cowled figure who stood motionless near at hand.

The cowl jogged slightly in the abbot's direction. "Which one, Father?" asked the man inside.

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"*You* know which one!"

"Yes, m'Lord." The monk fumbled in one sleeve. It seemed weighted down with half a bushel of documents and correspondence, but after a moment he found the right one. The address on the scroll read:

To: *My esteemed friend and fellow-in-Christ, Rev Fr Jerome of Pecos, SSA, Abbas, at the Abbey of Saint Leibowitz, Albertian Brothers, Empire of Denver, South Desert, Environs of Sanly Bowitts Village.*

Dispatched: *this Octave de Ss Petri et Pauli, Anno Domini MMMCLXXIV, at Texarkana, under Papal Immunity.*

"Well — read it," the abbot said impatiently.

"*Accedite ad eum . . .*" The monk crossed himself and murmured the Blessing of the Texts, as required by a tradition of the order. It was said before reading or writing, as punctiliously as the blessing at meals, for the preservation of literacy and learning through a black millennium had been the task of the Albertian monks, and their small rituals kept the task in focus.

He held the scroll high against the sunset so that it became a transparency, and his voice was faintly singsong as his eyes plucked the words out of a forest of superfluous pen-flourishing. The abbot leaned against the parapet to listen while he watched the buzzards circling over the Mesa of Last Resort.

"'*To a beloved friend, greetings! Once more we have a cross to press upon you, old shepherd of myopic bookworms, but perhaps the bearing of it will smack somewhat of triumph. It appears that Sheba is coming to Solomon after all, albeit probably to denounce him as a charlatan.*

"'*This is to notify you in advance that Don Thaddeo Pfardentrott, D.N.Sc., Sage of Sages, Scholar of Scholars, Fair Haired Son of a Certain Prince out of Wedlock, and God's Gift to a Thirsty Generation, has finally made up his mind to pay you a visit, having exhausted all hope of moving your library to this fair realm. He will be arriving sometime around the Feast of the Assumption, assuming he evades the bandit groups en route. He will be bringing his misgivings and a small party of armed cavalry, courtesy of Hannegan II, whose corpulent presence is at my elbow this very moment, watching me write. As a matter of fact, His Supremacy commanded me to write these presents, which purport to be high praise and advance recommendation of his cousin, in the hope you'll roll out the red carpet. But since m'Lord's secretary is in bed with the gout, I think I can speak candidly.*

"'*So let me warn you against this fellow Don Thaddeo. Treat him well, but trust him not. He is a brilliant scholar, but a secular scholar, and a political captive of the State. Here, Hannegan is the state. Further, the don is rather strongly anti-clerical, I think. Or perhaps anti-monastic, solely.*

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After his embarrassing birth, he was spirited away to a Benedictine monastery near here, and — but no, ask the courier about it. . . .'"

The monk paused to look up. The abbot was still watching the buzzards over Last Resort. After a moment, he glanced around at the silence.

"You heard about his childhood, Brother?" Jerome asked.

The monk nodded.

"Read."

The reading went on, but Father Jerome stopped listening. He knew it nearly by heart, and still he felt there was something he was missing, something Apollo was trying to say, but could not quite risk saying. Apollo was trying to warn him, but of what? The tone was mildly flippant, but it was full of ominous incongruities which might, the abbot felt, be intended to add up to a single dark congruity, if he could only add them right. What danger could there be in having the secular scholar study at the abbey?

According to the courier who had brought the letter, Don Thaddeo had been educated in the Benedictine monastery where he had been taken as a child to avoid embarrassment to the wife of his father. The don's father was Hannegan's uncle, but the don's mother was a serving maid, and not the legitimate wife of the duke. The legitimate duchess had never protested the duke's philandering until a common servant gave him the male heir the duke had always wanted, and then the duke's wife cried 'unfair.' The duchess had given him nothing but girls, and it infuriated her to be bested by a commoner. She had the child sent away, the servant flogged and dismissed, and got a new grip on the duke. She meant to get a manchild out of him to re-establish her honor. She gave him three more girls. The duke waited patiently for fifteen years, and when she died in miscarriage (of another girl), he promptly went to the Benedictines to reclaim his heir.

But the young Don Thaddeo was a bitter child. He had grown up within sight of the city and the palace where his first cousin was being prepared for the throne. Had his family ignored him, he might have grown up without resenting his position as an outcast. But his father had come to see him, as had the serving maid whose womb had borne him. They visited him just often enough to make him feel that he was entitled to something he was not getting. And Prince Hannegan came to the abbey one year for schooling, lorded it over his bastard cousin, and excelled him in all things but one: keenness of mind. The young don had hated the prince with a vengeance, and had set out to outstrip him at least in learning. But it was only a sham battle, for the prince had returned to the palace the following year as unlettered as he had come, nor was there any further attempt to educate him.

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The don continued the race alone and attained high scholastic honors, but his triumph was hollow as far as Hannegan was concerned. Hannegan didn't care. Don Thaddeo had come to despise them all, but with youthful inconsistency he was perfectly willing to return to the palace and take up his status as his father's son when the duke came for him, although this course forced him to forgive everyone except the dead duchess who had exiled him and the monks who had cared for him in that exile.

Perhaps, thought the abbot, he considers our cloister as a place of durance vile. There would no doubt be bitter memories and half-memories and memory-imaginings. . . .

" '. . . *seeds of controversy in the bed of the 'New Literacy,'* " the reader continued. " '*So take heed, and watch for the signs.*

" '*On the other hand, whatever Don Thaddeo's attitudes and prejudices, I must out of charity recommend him as a well-meaning man, or at least as an unmalicious child, like most of these educated pagans (and pagans they make themselves, in spite of all). He will behave if you are firm, but be careful. He has a mind like a loaded musket, and it can go off in any direction.*

" '*With prayers for your health and the intentions of your illustrious order, I remain — your friend and servant in Christ, Monsignor Marcus Apollo, Papal nuncio at the Court of Hannegan the Second, Texarkana.*' "

"Let me see that seal again," said the abbot.

The monk handed him the scroll. He brought it up close to his face so he could make out the blurred lettering impressed by a badly inked wooden stamp struck by a mallet. The lettering at the bottom of the page said: "*Ok'd by: Hannegan II, By Grace of God Mayor, Viceroy of Texarkana, Defender of the Faith, and Vaquero Supreme of the Plains. His Mark: (X).*"

"I wonder if His Supremacy didn't have someone read the letter to him later," worried the abbot.

"Don't you suppose, Father, that he would have stopped it from being sent if he had?"

"Probably. Still, Marcus was taking a big risk, writing so insultingly of the don and Hannegan, right under Hannegan's nose. It's not like Marcus to take a chance like that just for the satisfaction of speaking his mind. I suspect he wanted to tell us something else. He didn't dare. But wanting to made him feel a bit daring about superfluous things."

The monk accepted the speculation in silence. "You can go now," the priest told him. "I won't need you again this evening."

It had been several weeks since that letter had come, several weeks in which the abbot slept badly, suffered a recurrence of the old gastric trouble, and brooded overmuch on the past as if looking for something that might have been

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done differently in order to avert the future. *What future?* he demanded of himself. There was no logical reason to expect trouble. The controversy between the monks and the villagers had all but died down. There were no signs of trouble from the herdsman tribes to the north and east. Denver was not pressing its attempt to levy taxes upon monastic congregations. There were no troops in the vicinity. The monastery's well was still running. There seemed no current threat of plague among animals or men. The corn was doing well this year in the irrigated fields. There were signs of progress in the world, and the village of Sanly Bowitts had achieved the fantastic literacy rate of eight percent. For which the villagers might, but did not, thank the monks of the Albertian order.

And yet he felt a formless presence, a nameless gnawing evil that waited around the corner of the world for the sun to rise again. A buzzing evil like a swarm of hungry gnats in the desert sun. Like a heat-maddened rattler striking at rolling tumbleweed. Imminent. Hungry. Remorseless and single-minded.

The abbot was trying to get a grip on the devil, but the devil was still being evasive. The devil was only knee-high, but he weighed ten tons and had the strength of five hundred oxen. He was a non-malicious devil, and he bit through meat and bone and fingernail simply because he had a voracious appetite. And he was evil merely because he was a denial of good. Somewhere, the abbot felt, he was wading through a sea of men and leaving a screaming wake of the maimed.

What nonsense, old man! he chided himself. When you are tired of living, whatever threatens to happen appears evil, because it disturbs the deathlike peace of the life-weary. Are you *that* life-weary, old fossil? Oh, but it was something more than that. He was certain of it. It was a certainty not derived by logic, not by inference from observed events. It came from another source of knowledge than the senses. There were the senses, and then there was something deeper. The ancient fathers had called it "connaturality." The seat of non-symbolic wisdom, wisdom deriving from the fact of sharing a common nature with all men, all life, all substance, and a common image with One. It was an unhappy wisdom at times, for it was without logic, and therefore without words, and therefore impossible of communication. Whatever is impossible of communication is unhappy and a burden. Twelve centuries before, men had scoffed at connaturality as a source of knowing, but because it worked in spite of them, some invented a sixth sense to explain its workings, tried to measure it with meters and use it to predict cards. But the cards were symbols, and there is no connaturality of symbols, only of men and things. And the abbot's connatural-

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ity with the world, perhaps sharpened by his monastic withdrawal from the world, was being eaten by a Fury.

"Suppose the buzzards have got old Benjamin yet?" asked a quiet voice at his elbow.

Father Jerome glanced around with a start in the twilight. It was Father Gault, a young priest who was his assistant and probable successor. He stood fingering a rose and looking embarrassed for having disturbed the old man's solitude.

"Benjamin? You've heard something about Benjamin?" asked the abbot.

"No, Father." He laughed uneasily. "You seemed to be looking toward the mesa, and I thought maybe you were thinking about the Old Jew." He glanced toward the anvil-shaped mountain silhouetted against the gray patch of sky in the west. "There's a wisp of smoke up there, so I guess he's still alive."

"Someday I'm going to ride over there an pay him a visit," said the abbot in a tone of abrupt decision.

"You sound like you're leaving tonight," Gault chuckled. "Better not. They say he throws rocks at climbers."

"I haven't seen him for five years. I ought to go. I'm ashamed that I haven't gone. He's lonely."

"Then why does he insist on being a hermit?"

"To escape being lonely. In a young world."

The young priest laughed. "That may make some kind of sense, Father, but I don't see it."

"You will, when you're my age, or his."

"I don't expect to get that old. He lays claim to several thousand years."

The abbot smiled reminiscently. "And you know, I can't dispute him either. I met him when I was a novice, fifty-odd years ago, and I'd swear he looked just as old then as he does now. He must be well over a hundred."

"Five thousand four hundred and eight, he says. I think he believes it, too. An interesting madness."

"I'm not so sure he's mad, Father Gault. Just devious in his sanity. What did you want to see me about?"

"Three minor matters. First, how do we get the poet out of the royal guest suite? Before Don Thaddeo arrives. He's due to get here in a few days, and the poet's taken root . . ."

"I'll handle the poet. What else?"

"Tonight's services. Will you be in the chapel?"

"Not until Complin. You take over. What else?"

"Controversy in the basement. Over Brother Kornhoer's experiment."

"Who, and how?"

"Brother Armbruster thinks the world is coming to an end, and Brother Kornhoer thinks the world is just beginning. Kornhoer moves

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something to make room for a piece of equipment. Armbruster yells *Perdition!* Kornhoer yells *Progress!* And they have at each other again. Then they come fuming to me to settle it. I scold them for losing their tempers. They get sheepish and fawn on each other for ten minutes. Six hours later, the floor shivers from Armbruster bellowing *Perdition!* down in the library. I can settle the blowups, but there seems to be a Basic Issue — capital *B*, capital *I*."

"What?"

"I'm not sure. Except the perdition-progress theme."

"All right, I'll track it down. Is that all?"

"That's all. Good night, Father." He started away, but paused. "By the way, do you think Brother Kornhoer's contraption will work?"

"I hope not. I was interested at first, but the work has caused so much commotion that I'm sorry I let him start it. If it doesn't work, it'll fail just in time for Don Thaddeo's arrival. That would cause Kornhoer to be mortified, and I think he needs a little mortification. To remind him of his vocation, before he begins thinking he was called to holy orders mainly for the purpose of building a generator of electrical essences in the abbey's basement."

"But you'll have to admit, Father, that it would be quite an achievement, if successful."

"I don't *have* to admit it," the abbot told him curtly. "Goodnight, Father."

When Gault was gone, the abbot debated briefly with himself and decided to handle the problem of the poet before the problem of perdition versus progress. The solution to the poet at least was obvious. The solution was for the poet to get out of the royal suite, and preferably out of the abbey, out of the vicinity of the abbey, out of sight, hearing, and mind. But the obviousness of the solution did not make it easy to achieve.

The abbot gathered his robes about him and hiked across the grounds toward the guest house. He moved by feel, for the buildings were monoliths of shadow under the stars, and only a few windows glowed with candlelight. The windows of the royal suite were dark, but the poet kept odd hours and might well be in.

Inside the building, he groped for the right door, found it, and knocked. There was no answer. He thought he heard a muffled bleating sound, but it might have come from outside the building. He knocked again, then tried the door. It opened.

Faint red light from a charcoal burner softened the blackness, and the room reeked of stale food.

"Poet?"

Again the muffled bleating, but closer now. He went to the burner, raked up an incandescent coal, and lit a splinter of kindling. He glanced

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around and shuddered at the litter of the room. It was empty. He transferred the flame to an oil lamp and went to explore the rest of the suite. It would have to be thoroughly scrubbed and fumigated and possibly exorcised before Don Thaddeo moved in. He hoped to make the poet do the scrubbing, but knew the chance of it was remote.

In the second room, the abbot developed the sudden feeling that he was being watched. He stopped and looked around slowly.

A single eyeball peered at him from a vase of water on the shelf. The abbot nodded at it familiarly and went on.

In the third room, he met the goat. It was their first meeting.

The goat was standing atop a tall cabinet, munching turnip greens. It looked like a small breed of mountain goat, but it had a bald head that appeared bright blue by candlelight. Undoubtedly a freak by birth.

A hideous thought suddenly occurred to the abbot.

"Poet?" he inquired softly, looking straight at the goat and gripping the crucifix of his rosary for protection.

"In here," came a sleepy voice from the fourth room.

The goat went on munching greens. The abbot sighed his relief and released his grip on the cross.

The poet was sprawled across the bed with a bottle of wine in easy reach, and he blinked irritably at the light with his one good eye. "I was asleep," he complained, adjusting his black patch and reaching for the bottle.

"Then wake up. You're moving out of here immediately. Tonight. Dump your possessions in the hall to let the suite air out. Sleep in the stable boy's cell downstairs if you must. Then come back in the morning and scrub this place out."

The poet looked like a bruised lily for a moment, then made a grab for something under the blankets. He brought out a fist and stared at it thoughtfully. "Who used these quarters last?" he asked.

"Monsignor Longi. But why?"

"I wondered who brought the bedbugs." The poet opened his fist, pinched something out of the palm, cracked it between his nails, and flipped it away. "Don Thaddeo can have them. I don't want them. I've been eaten up alive ever since I moved in. I was planning on leaving, but now that you've offered me my old cell back, I'll be happy —"

"I didn't mean . . ."

"— to accept your kind hospitality a little longer. Only until my book is finished, of course."

"What book? — Never mind. Just get your things out of here."

"Now?"

"Now."

"Good. I don't think I could stand sleeping with these bugs another night." The poet rolled out of bed, but paused for a drink.

"Give me the wine," the priest ordered.

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"Sure. Have some. It's a pleasant vintage."

"Thank you, since you stole it from our cellars. It happens to be sacramental wine. Did that occur to you?"

"It hasn't been consecrated."

"I'm surprised you thought of that." He tucked the bottle in his robe.

"I didn't steal it, I —"

"Never mind. Now where did you steal the goat?"

"Not 'steal,'" the poet complained.

"Then what?"

"A gift."

"From whom?"

"A dear friend."

"Whose dear friend?"

"Mine, sire."

"A paradox. Where did you —" A flicker of surprise crossed Father Jerome's face. "You stole it from old Benjamin?"

"Not 'stole'."

"Then what?"

"Benjamin insisted I take it as a gift after I composed a sonnet in his honor."

"The *truth!*"

The poet swallowed sheepishly. "I won it from him at mumble-peg."

The abbot nodded.

"It's true! The old wretch nearly cleaned me out, and then refused to allow me credit. I had to stake my glass eye against the goat. But I won everything back."

"Get the goat out of the abbey."

"But it's a marvelous species of goat. The milk is of an unearthly odor, and contains essences. In fact, it's responsible for the Old Jew's longevity."

"How much of it?"

"All five thousand four hundred and eight years of it."

"What were you doing up on Last Resort?"

"Playing mumble-peg with old Benjamin."

"I mean . . ." The abbot steeled himself and broke it off. "Never mind. Just get yourself moved out. And tomorrow get the goat back to Benjamin."

"But I won it fairly!"

"Then take it to the stable and I'll have it returned to him myself."

"Why?"

"We've no use for a goat. Neither have you."

"Ho, ho," the poet said archly.

"What did *that* mean, pray?"

"Need you ask? Don Thaddeo is coming. Oh, there will be need of a goat before he's finished."

"Why?"

"Because history tends to repeat its clichés *ad nauseam*, of course. But don't let it bother you. A suitable goat will be found, all right; you can be sure of that." He chuckled maliciously.

The abbot snorted and went to wrestle with the contention in the basement.

III

The basement had been dug during the centuries of nomadic in-

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filtration from the north, when the Bayring Horde had overrun most of the Plains and desert, looting and vandalizing all villages in their path. The abbey's books and records had been walled up in underground vaults to protect the priceless writings from both nomads and soi-disant crusaders of the schismatic orders founded to fight the hordes but turned to random pillaging and sectarian strife. Neither the nomads nor the Military Orders of San Pancratz would have valued the abbey's books, but the nomads would have destroyed them for the pure joy of destruction and the militant monastics would have burned many of them in the name of the theology of Vissarion the antipope. To protect the small heritage of knowledge out of the past, many of the priceless volumes — hand-copied from memory by the first Albertians after the Deluge of Flame — had been bound in iron jackets and chained to their places on the shelves.

But now a Dark Age was passing. During twelve centuries, a small flame of knowledge had been kept smoldering in the monasteries, but only now were there minds ready to be kindled.

Once, during the last age of reason, the proudest among the thinkers of that age had claimed that valid knowledge was indestructible, that ideas were deathless and truth immortal. But that was true only in the subtlest sense, thought the abbot, and not superficially true at all. Ideas must find their incarnation in a human society, and within a framework of human culture wherein they acquire value as well as validity. And cultures were not immortal. Man assembled a people, and gave it a goal, and it became aware of its meanings and destinies, and the awareness became its culture. And then Man shattered this people, and broke their images and cut down their groves and scattered them over the land. And the meanings and destinies were gone, and with them died the culture, and with the culture went those scraps of knowledge which were independently true but no longer valued. And truth retreated into a limbo of forgotten potentialities. Truth could be crucified, but now perhaps . . . . a resurrection?

The library was full of ancient words, ancient formulae, ancient meanings detached from minds that had died long ago, when their culture had fallen. Yet there is so little we can understand, thought the abbot. A meaning detached from a culture ceases to have apparent meaning. In founding the Albertian Order for the task of preserving knowledge, Saint Leibowitz had offered a veil of Veronica to the crucified, and the veil came away marked with the image of truth, but it was only an image, faintly recorded, incomplete, and difficult to understand. The monks had kept the image, and now it was there for

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the world to see and interpret if the world wanted it and could understand it. It would not, of itself, create a revival of ancient science or high civilization, for cultures sprang from peoples and not from musty tomes, but the books could point out directions and offer hints to an evolving science. It had happened once before.

And this time, thought the priest, we're going to make them remember who kept a spark burning while the world slept! He stopped to look back. Had the poet's goat bleated just then?

But the clamor of noise from the basement blanketed his hearing. He trudged on down the underground stairs toward the source of turmoil.

Someone was hammering steel pins into stone. Sweat and loud voices mingled with the odor of old books. The library seemed at a rolling boil of unscholarly activity. Monks hurried past with tools. Monks stood in groups and studied floor plans. Monks shifted desks and tables and heaved at makeshift machinery, rocking it into place. Confusion by lamplight. Brother Armbruster, the librarian, stood watching it from a remote stall, his arms tightly folded and his face grim. The abbot avoided his accusing gaze. The abbot found himself a little ashamed of the project, although he had assented to it readily enough in the beginning.

"Well, Father, soon we shall have light such as no man alive has ever seen," said Brother Kornhoer, the author of the project and the abbey's present occupant of the Chair of Natural Science.

"The project is not without its vanity," muttered the priest.

The monk's eyes went wide. "Vanity? To apply what we've learned?" he asked.

"Never mind. I was thinking about our haste to apply it in time to impress a certain visiting scholar. But never mind. Let's see this engineering wizardry."

They walked toward the makeshift machinery. To the abbot, it made no sense. There were four wagon wheels mounted on a single axle a few inches apart. Their thick steel tires were scored with grooves, and the grooves supported countless birds' nests of copper wire which had been drawn from coinage at the local smithy in Sanly Bowitts. Blocks of steel faced the tires like brakes, and the blocks too were wound with innumerable turns of wire — "field windings" Kornhoer called them. The axle was connected by pulleys and belts to a sort of waist-high turnstile.

"It'll be the greatest physical improvement at the abbey since the Blessed Farnsworth installed the printing press last century," Kornhoer said proudly.

"Will it work?" the abbot wondered.

"I'm certain of it, Father."

I'm not, thought the priest, but suppressed the utterance. "Where does the light come out?" he asked,

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peering at the odd contraption.

The monk laughed. "Oh, we've made a special lamp for that. What you're looking at here is only the dynamo. It produces that electrical essence — which the lamp will burn."

"This essence — it can't be extracted from mutton fat perhaps?" he asked, ruefully contemplating the amount of space the dynamo was taking up.

"No, no. The electrical essence is, well . . . do you want me to explain?"

"Better not. Natural science is not my specialty, and I would rather leave it to younger minds." He stepped back to avoid being brained by a timber which two novice carpenters carried past. "Tell me," he said, "if by studying writings from the Leibowitzian age you can learn how to construct this thing, why do you suppose none of our predecessors saw fit to construct it?"

The monk remained silent for a moment. "It's hard to explain," he said at last. "Actually, in the writings that survive, there's no direct description of the construction of a dynamo. Rather, you might say the description is implicit in the whole collection of fragmentary writings that were preserved. Implicit, because of a variety of indirect references in a number of sources. It has to be got out by deduction. But to be able to get it, you need a certain amount of theoretical knowledge to begin with."

"You're saying that we have a little theoretical knowledge that our predecessors didn't have?"

"That's right, Father. We aren't theoreticians. We never have been. It wasn't the Albertians' job. But now, well, there are a few men like Don Thaddeo . . ." His tone became one of deep respect when he spoke the name, and he left the sentence unfinished.

"The theoreticians are beginning to give you something to go on now, eh?"

"Yes. Actually, it was Don Thaddeo's . . ." (The respectful tone again, the abbot noticed.)". . . work on the Mobility of Electrical Essences and the Conservation Theorem that gave us the background we needed."

"Then he should be pleased to see his work applied. Where is the lamp itself, may I ask? I hope it's no larger than the dynamo."

"This is it, Father," said the monk, picking up a small object from the table. It seemed no more than a bracket holding two black rods, adjusted by a thumbscrew. "These are carbons," Kornhoer explained. "The ancients would have called it an arc lamp. There was another kind, but it required an evacuated bulb and certain metals we cannot find."

"Amazing. Where does the light come from?"

"Here." The monk pointed to the empty space between the ends of the carbons.

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"It must be a very small light," said the abbot.

"But I think it will be very bright. Brighter perhaps than a hundred candles."

"No!"

"You find the possibility impressive?"

"More impressive than . . ." *than I expect to find the actuality*, he started to say, but said instead: ". . . than the installation of the printing press."

"I have been wondering," the monk said rather shyly, "if the ancients used them on their altars, as we use candles."

"No," said the abbot. "Definitely, *no*. I can tell you that. They absolutely did not, and you will please dismiss that idea as rapidly as possible, and don't let it occur to you again."

"Yes, Father."

"Where are you going to put the thing?"

Brother Kornhoer looked blank for a moment, then stared speculatively around the gloomy vault. "I hadn't thought about it. I suppose we should put it over the desk where Don Thaddeo . . ." (Why does he pause like that every time he says it, the abbot wondered irritably.) ". . . will be working."

'We'd better go talk to Brother Armbruster about it," the priest decided, and then noting the monk's sudden discomfort: "What's wrong? Have you and Brother Armbruster been at it again?"

Kornhoer's face writhed with apology. "Really, Father, I haven't lost my temper with him once. Oh, there were some words, but . . ." He shrugged. "He insists on calling it a 'witch light,' and he doesn't want anything moved. It's a little hard to reason with him. His eyes are half-blind from reading by candlelight now, but he still says it's devil's work we're about."

Father Jerome frowned slightly as they crossed the room toward the stall where Armbruster stood glowering at the proceedings. The librarian was beginning to get crotchety and cantankerous at times, which was understandable and excusable, as long as the cantankerousness didn't head in any single monomanic direction, which would make it intolerable. Maybe Armbruster needed taking down a peg, the priest thought.

"Well, you've got your way now, have you?" the librarian said to Kornhoer as they came up. "And next you'll be putting in a mechanical librarian, I suppose."

"We find hints that there once were such things," the monastic scholar growled darkly. "In the descriptions of the *machina analytica*, there are references to —"

"Enough, enough," the priest said hastily, then to the librarian: "We must provide Don Thaddeo with suitable work space for his researches. What can you suggest?"

Brother Armbruster jerked his thumb toward the Natural Section

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book stall. "Let him read at the lectern in there like anyone else," he grumbled.

"What about setting up an office for him here on the main floor, Father?" suggested Brother Kornhoer. "Besides a desk, he'll probably need an abacus, a wall slate, and a drawing board. We could partition it off with temporary screens."

"I thought he'd be needing our Leibowitzian references and earliest writings," the librarian said suspiciously.

"He will."

"Then he'll have to walk back and forth a lot. The rare volumes are chained, and the chains won't reach this far."

"That's no problem," Kornhoer said irritably. "Take off the chains. They look silly anyway. The schismatic cults have all died out or become regional, and nobody's heard of the Pancratzian military orders in a hundred years."

Armbruster reddened angrily. "No you don't," he snapped. "The chains stay on."

"But that's unreasonable. Why?"

"If it's not the book-burning fanatics, it's the villagers we've to be worrying about. The chains stay on."

Kornhoer turned to the abbot and spread his hands. "See, Father?"

"He's right," said the priest. "There's too much agitation in the village. First the town council expropriated our school, you'll remember. We got that straightened out, and then they started the village library and wanted us to fill its shelves — mostly with rare volumes. So then they accuse us of promoting illiteracy and hoarding secret knowledge. You remember the demonstration?"

"It didn't mean anything, Father. I doubt if ten percent of the demonstrators were even literate. It was just that demogogue, Macklehark, stirring up trouble. It didn't mean anything."

"Perhaps not. But you'll remember it wound up as a fairly disgraceful exhibition — villagers splashing whitewash slogans all over our walls, and novices dumping slop-jars at them over the parapet. Right now, they're trying to incorporate us into the town so they can tax us."

"Ingrates," growled the librarian. "We've made them the most literate community in the region, and they despise us for it."

"Not at all," argued Kornhoer. "There's some animosity, to be sure, but they'd howl to Heaven if we ever moved away. And remember how they helped us twenty years ago during the epidemic? They're really proud of the abbey. And it's history."

"Then why the animosity?"

"That's obvious, I think. We attract pilgrims and travelers from everywhere. We're a showplace. They like to think of us as an attraction *at* Sanly Bowitts. People used to say, 'Sanly Bowitts is near the Albertian Monastery.' Now some of them say,

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'The monastery is near Sanly Bowitts.' The town's growing; it wants to own us, dominate us, merely because we're here. To the town, we're a piece of real estate and some ancient architecture *first* — and a religious order second. We resist being dominated, so there's animosity, but behind it is only community pride."

"Community pride!" snorted the librarian. "That wretched array of hovels! With an atheist mayor and a bawdy house across from the school!"

"Well, at least there's a school."

"Enough!" said the priest. "Brother Armbruster's right about the books. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if Macklehark tries another expropriation move, just to make propaganda when we resist. The rare volumes should stay chained."

"All right," Kornhoer sighed. "So he'll have to work in the stall."

"Now, where'll we place your wondrous lamp?"

The monks turned to look at the cubicle. It was one of fourteen identical stalls, sectioned by subject matter, facing the central floor. Each stall had its archway. Several times in earlier generations, the monks had walled up the arches to seal off the precious volumes and defend them against looters and heretical fanatics, and once the stalls had remained sealed for half a century. But now all traces of temporary masonry were gone, and from an iron hook embedded in the keystone of each archway hung a heavy crucifix. The stations of the cross were carved in stone beside the arches.

"There's only one place for it, then," said Brother Kornhoer. "If he's to work in the stall, we'll have to hang it where the crucifix is. Temporarily. There's no other —"

"*Heathen!*" shouted the librarian. "Pagan! Desecrator!" Brother Armbruster raised trembling hands and turned his eyes to Heaven. "God help me, I'll tear him apart with these hands! Where will he stop? Take him away, away!" He turned his back on them, his hands still trembling aloft.

Father Jerome frowned sharply. While he himself had winced slightly at Kornhoer's suggestion, it was plain that Brother Armbruster's temperament was taking a turn for the worse. The priest had never expected him to wear a meekness that was alien to his nature. But there were certain standards of monastic character . . .

"Brother Armbruster," the priest said quietly, "I suggest you calm down, and let me recommend self-discipline to you as a project for improvement."

The monk lowered his hands slightly and turned. "But Father, you heard what he —"

"Brother Armbruster, you will please get the shelf-ladder and climb up to remove the crucifix."

The color left the aged librarian's face. He stared at his superior, speechless and open-mouthed.

"This is not a chapel," said the

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abbot. "The placement of images is not critical. We wish to provide adequate light for our guest. Later on, we'll work out some kind of a permanent arrangement of fixtures, if Brother Kornhoer's device works as desired. But for the present, you will please remove the crucifix. It's the only suitable place for the lamp. I know this whole project has unsettled your basement — and perhaps your digestion — but it's all in the interest of progress."

"You'd make Our Lord move over to make room for progress!" wheezed the librarian.

"Brother Armbruster!"

"Why don't you just hang the witch light around His neck?"

The abbot's face went frigid. "I do not *force* your obedience, Brother," he said coldly. "Do you wish to give it cheerfully, or do you regret your vows?"

The librarian wilted.

"I'll be hearing confessions before early Mass in the morning," the priest added.

"I'll get the ladder, Father," the monk whispered, and shuffled unsteadily away.

The abbot glanced up at the Christ on the rood in the archway. "Do you mind?" he wondered.

There was a knot in his stomach. The knot would exact its price of him. He got out of the basement before anyone could notice his discomfort. It was not good to let them see how such trivial unpleasantness could overcome him these days.

The installation was finished. The abbot remained in his study during the test. He sat slumped at his desk and waited for the news, feeling little concern at the moment for its success or failure. He kept one hand tucked into the front of his robe. He felt gingerly at his stomach, and patted as if trying to soothe a hysterical canary that fluttered there.

Internal cramping again. It came whenever unpleasantness threatened, and sometimes went away again when unpleasantness exploded into the open where he could wrestle with it. But now it was not going away.

He was being warned, and he knew it. Whether the warning was the work of an angel, a demon, or his own psyche, its intent was clear enough: it told him to beware of himself, and of a reality somehow not yet faced.

What now? he wondered, permitting himself a silent belch and a silent *beg pardon* toward the statue of Saint Leibowitz in the shrinelike niche in the corner of the study.

A fly was crawling along Saint Leibowitz' nose. At times the saint's eyes seemed to look cross-eyed at the fly, and at other times they seemed to fix upon the abbot with a request to brush it off. "It's a fly, not a termite," the abbot reassured the Twenty-Ninth Century wood carving.

The abbot was fond of the statue, and frequently made it a party to

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his arguments between himself and himself, with the saint sometimes appearing in the juridical robes of conscience, and at other times coming into it as *amicus curiae*. The statue wore a curious grin of a sort that was unusual to find on the faces of ecclesiastical images. The grin was turned down at one corner, the eyebrows were pulled low in a slightly dubious frown, although there were laugh-wrinkles at the corners of the eyes. Because of the hangman's rope over one shoulder, the saint's expression often seemed puzzling. Possibly it resulted from slight irregularities in the fine-grained wood, such irregularities dictating to the carver's hand as the hand sought to bring out finer details than were normally possible with even the hardest and finest of woods. Anyhow, the wooden saint was grinning a most unusual grin, and the abbot often marveled that it had survived three centuries of his predecessors.

That grin will ruin you someday, he warned the image. *I* like it, but one of my straight-laced successors will decide it's not sanctimonious enough, and replace you with a Leibowitz whose smile is long-suffering and who never looks cross-eyed at flies. You'll be eaten by termites in some musty prop-room of outdated sacramental-ornamentals, unless somebody rescues you in time. To survive the Church's slow sifting of the arts, you have to have a surface that can please a righteous simpleton, and yet you have to have a depth beneath the surface to please a discerning sage. The Church's sifter works slowly, getting a turn of the handle whenever some new prelate inspects the episcopal chambers and mutters, "Some of this garbage has got to go." The sifter was usually full of dulcet pap, and more pap was added when the old was ground out, but what was *not* ground out was gold, and it lasted, although it remained surrounded by transient gaudiness and gilt

The abbot fanned himself with a fan of buzzard feathers, but the breeze was not cooling. The air from the window was like an oven's breath off the scorched desert, adding to the discomfort caused him by the devil or ruthless angel that fiddled around with his belly. It was the kind of heat that hints of lurking danger from sun-crazed rattlers and brooding lightning storms over the mountains, of rabid dogs and tempers made vicious by the scorch. It made the cramping worse.

"Please?" he murmured aloud to the saint, meaning a non-verbal prayer for cooler weather, sharper wits, and more insight into his vague sense of something wrong. Maybe my diet's bad, he thought.

"There you go again," murmured the part of his mind that spoke for the saint in the corner. "It's your intellectual diet that's bad. Too much optimistic and unrealistic pap, Jerome. So your stomach forces you to feed *it* nothing but

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pap as well. So why don't you face it, Jerome?"

Face what?

But the saint wasn't giving him any ready-made answers.

Pap. Sifting out the chaff. Sometimes his mind worked in snatches. It was better to let it work that way when the cramps came, and the world weighed on him. What did the world weigh? It weighed pap too, and looked for gold. The world weighed ruthlessly and much faster. It was in a bigger hurry and threw away more gold, and its scales were sometimes crooked, but it weighed.

And a blindfolded king came riding across the desert, carrying a crooked set of scales and rattling a pair of loaded dice.

"No!" the abbot grunted aloud, and then wondered what he had grunted it about.

"Yes," insisted the eyes of the wooden saint.

The abbot set his jaw and looked away from the saint. Sometimes he felt that the saint was laughing at him. Saints weren't supposed to laugh at people, were they? Now, old man, have you forgotten Saint Maisie of York who died during a laughing fit? But that was different. She was laughing at herself. No, it's not different either. *Ulp!* The silent belch again.

And the king was weighing books in the basement with his pair of crooked scales. But how do you know the scales are crooked? What makes you think the Leibowitzian heritage doesn't contain some pap? How well have the treasured fragments of a dead civilization fared in the hands of thirty generations of dedicated but scientifically ignorant monks? Like children entrusted with remembering and delivering a long and complicated message to another adult. How do you know the message hasn't been reduced to gibberish, embellished with olive leaves and cherubims?

Ouch! That one made the fist clench tighter, didn't it, old man?

He avoided looking at the saint. "Feeling scandalized in my Order, old man?" the saint seemed to be asking.

The ruthless angel ambushed him with a hot burst at his corporeal core. It felt like a hot wire breaking. He clutched at the front of his robe and bent over the desk. Hard breathing from his nostrils swept a clean spot in the thin film of desert dust on the desktop. The dust had a harsh smell to it. The room went pink, swarming with black gnats. I don't dare belch or I might shake something loose but Holy Saint and Patron I've got to. Pain is. Ergo sum. Lord Christ God accept this token.

He belched, tasted salt, let his head fall onto the desk.

Does the chalice have to be now right this very minute, or can I wait awhile? . . . but the crucifixion is always now. Now ever since when. Before Abraham even is always now. Before Pfardentrott even. Now. Always for everybody

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anyhow is to get nailed on it and then to hang on it and if you drop off they beat you to death with a shovel anyhow so do it with dignity, old man. If you can belch with dignity you may get to Heaven if you're sorry enough about messing up the rug. He felt very apologetic.

He waited a long time. Some of the gnats died and the room lost its blush but went hazy gray.

Well, are we going to hemorrhage now, or are we just going to fool around about it? . . . There! That's the tone to use on novices.

He probed the haze and found the face of Saint Leibowitz. It was still grinning at him. It was a small grin, sad, understanding, and . . . something else. Laughing at the hangman. Laughing for the hangman. Still something else. It was the first time he had seen it clearly. There was also a laugh in the chalice. Haec commixtio. He was very sleepy suddenly, and the saint's face grayed over, but the abbot went on grinning back.

Gault found him slumped across the desk shortly before Vespers. Blood showed between his teeth. The young priest felt for a pulse, and the abbot awakened.

"I'll get Brother Andrew at once, Father," said Gault.

"Come back here!" the abbot snapped. "What did you want?"

"Nothing, Father, I'll be right back as soon as I get Brother —"

"Bother the medic! My door was closed. You must have come in here for something. Now *shut* the door, sit down, and tell me."

"The test was a success. Brother Kornhoer's lamp, I mean."

"All right, let's hear it. Come in, sit down, begin talking, and don't stop till you've told me all of it." He straightened his robe and found a bit of linen with which to blot his mouth. He felt a little dizzy, but the fist in his belly had come unclenched. His mind refused to focus clearly on what the younger priest was saying, but he clung tightly to the surge of frightened impulse that had made him call Gault back: I've got to keep him in here until I can wake up enough to think. I can't let him go for Andrew, not yet, because the news will get out that the old man is about finished. I've got to decide whether it's time to be finished or not.

IV

Hongan Os was essentially a just and kindly man. When he saw a party of his warriors making sport of the Laredan captives, he paused to watch; and when they tied three Laredans by their heels between horses and whipped the horses into frenzied flight, Hongan Os decided to intervene. He had the warriors flogged, for Hongan Os — Mad Bear — was known to be a merciful chieftain. He had never mistreated a horse.

"Killing captives is woman's work," he growled scornfully at the culprits. "Cleanse yourselves lest

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you be squaw-marked, and withdraw from camp until the new moon, for you are banished twelve days." And answering their moans of protest: "Suppose the horses had dragged one of them through camp? The Grass-Eater chieflings are our guests, and it is known that they are easily frightened by blood. Especially the blood of their own kind. Take heed."

"But these are Grass Eaters from the South," a warrior objected. "And our guests are Grass Eaters from the East. Is there not a pact between us and the East to make war upon the South?"

"If you speak of it again, your tongue shall be cut out and fed to the dogs!" Mad Bear warned. "Forget that you heard such things."

"Will the Grass Eaters be among us men for many days, O son of the great?"

"Who knows what the farmers plan?" Mad Bear growled crossly. "They say their party will split here. Some of them are going on into the dry lands, to a place of the black-robed ones, a place of the Grass Eater priests. The others have come to discuss . . . but that is not for your ears. Now go, and be ashamed."

Discipline was becoming lax of late. The clans were restless. It was known among the Plains people that Hongan Os had clasped arms across a treaty-fire with a messenger from Texarkana, and that a shaman had clipped hair and fingernails from each of them to make a good-faith doll as a defense against treachery by either party. It was known that an agreement had been made, and any agreement with the agrarian peoples was regarded by most as a cause for shame. Mad Bear had felt the veiled hostility of the elders, and the open scorn of younger warriors, but there was no explaining to them until the time came.

The value of secrecy had been impressed on him by the emissary of the Grass Eater king from the East. If the Laredans learned that the tribes were being armed by Hannegan, the plan would fail. If Mad Bear's people knew that the arms were gifts, rather than the spoils of border raids, there would be the possibility of Laredo learning of it from captives. It was necessary, therefore, to let the tribes continue to mutter about the shame of talking peace with the farmers of the East.

But the talk was not of peace. The talk was good, and it promised loot.

A few weeks ago, Mad Bear himself had led a "war party" to the east and returned with a hundred head of horses, four dozen long rifles, several kegs of black powder, ample shot, and one prisoner. But not even the warriors who had accompanied him knew that the cache of arms had been planted there for him by Hannegan's men, nor that the prisoner was in reality a Texarkanan cavalry officer who would in the future give advice to Mad Bear about probable Laredan tactics during the fighting to come.

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Hongan Os was justifiably proud of himself as a bargainer. He had pledged nothing but to refrain from making war upon Texarkana and to stop stealing cattle from the eastern borders, but only as long as Hannegan furnished him with arms and supplies. The agreement to war against Laredo was tacit, but it fitted Mad Bear's natural inclinations, and there was no need for a formal pact. Alliance with one of his enemies would permit him to deal with one foe at a time, and eventually he might regain the grazing lands that had been encroached upon and settled by the agrarian populations during the previous century.

Night had fallen by the time the clans chief rode into camp, and a chill had come over the Plains. His guests from the East sat huddled in their blankets around the council fire with three of the old ones while the usual ring of curious children gaped from surrounding shadows and peeped under tent skirts at the strangers. There were twelve of them in all, but in two distinct parties that had traveled together but apparently cared little for each other's company. The leader of one party was obviously a madman, and while Mad Bear did not deplore insanity — which was prized by the shamans as the most intense of supernatural visitations — he had not known that the farmers likewise regarded madness as a virtue in a leader. This one spent half of his time digging in the earth down by the dry river bed and the other half jotting mysteriously in a small book. Obviously a witch, and not to be trusted.

Mad Bear stopped only long enough to don his ceremonial wolf robes and have a shaman paint the totem mark on his forehead before he joined the group at the fire.

"Be afraid!" an old warrior keened ceremonially as the clans chief stepped into the firelight. "Be afraid, for the mighty one walks among his children. Grovel, O clans, for his name is Mad Bear, and a name well won, for as a youth he did overcome without weapons a bear run mad, with his bare hands he did strangle her, verily in the northlands. . . ."

Hongan Os ignored the eulogies and accepted a cup of blood from the old woman who served the council fire. It was fresh from a butchered steer and still warm. He drained it before turning to nod at the easterners who watched the brief wassail with apparent disquiet.

"Tell me," said the madman when the chieftain was seated. "How is it that your people drink no water? Is it a religious aversion?"

"It is said," growled Mad Bear, "that water is for cattle and farmers, milk is for children, and blood for men. Should it be otherwise?"

The madman was not insulted. He studied the chief for a moment with searching gray eyes, then nodded at one of his fellows. "That 'water for

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the cattle' explains it," he said. "The everlasting drought out here. A herdsman people would conserve what little water there is for the animals. I was wondering if they backed it by a religious taboo."

His companion grimaced and spoke in the Texarkanan tongue. "Water! God! There's such a thing as too much conformity!" He spat dryly. "Blood. Bah. Why can't we have one little —"

"Not until we leave," the other retorted sharply.

"But Don Thaddeo, when —"

"Soon," snapped the scholar, and readdressed the clans chief in the Plains dialect. "My comrade was admiring the virility and good health of your people," he said. "Possibly your diet is responsible."

"Give the outlander a cup of red," Mad Bear told the old woman.

Don Thaddeo's companion shuddered, but made no protest.

"I have, O chief, a request to make of your hospitality," said the scholar. "Tomorrow we continue our journey to the west. If some of your warriors could accompany our party, we should be honored."

"Why?"

Don Thaddeo paused. "Why . . . as guides . . ." He stopped, smiled suddenly. "No, I'll be truthful. Some of your people disapprove of our presence here. While your hospitality has been . . ."

Hongan Os threw back his head and roared with laughter. "They are afraid of the lesser clans," he said to the old ones. "They are afraid of being ambushed as soon as they are out of my sight. They eat grass and are afraid of a fight."

The scholar flushed slightly.

"Fear nothing, outlander!" chortled the clans chief. "Real *men* shall accompany you."

Don Thaddeo inclined his head in mock gratitude.

"Tell us," said Mad Bear, "what do you seek in the west desert? New lands? I can tell you there are none. Except for a few oases, nothing grows that even cattle will eat."

"Our concern is not with new lands," answered the visitor." We go to seek . . ." He paused. In the normal dialect, there was no way to explain the purpose of the journey to the abbey of Saint Leibowitz. ". . . to seek the skills of an ancient sorcery."

One of the old ones, a shaman, seemed to prick up his ears. "An ancient sorcery in the west? I know of no magicians there but the black-robed ones, and they have no magic worth looking after. Their messengers can be captured so easily that it is scarcely sport — although they do take torture rather well. What sorcery can you learn from them?"

"Privately, I agree with you," said Don Thaddeo. "But it is said that writings . . . uh . . . incantations of great power are hoarded at one of their abbeys. If it is true, obviously the black-robed ones don't know how to use them, but we hope to master them for ourselves."

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"Will the black-robed ones permit you to observe their secrets?"

Don Thaddeo smiled. "They don't dare hide them any longer," he said. "We can take them, if we must."

"A brave saying," snorted Mad Bear. "Evidently the farmers are braver among their own kind, although they are meek enough among *real* people."

The scholar, who had stomached his fill of the nomad's insults, chose to retire early. The remainder of the journey to Saint Leibowitz Abbey was still a long one.

The soldiers remained at the council fire to discuss with Hongan Os the war that was certain to come, but the war, after all, was none of Don Thaddeo's affair, and the political aspirations of his monarch were far from his interest in a renaissance of learning in a dark world.

V

The old hermit stood at the edge of the mesa and watched the approach of the dust speck across the desert. The hermit munched, muttered words and chuckled silently into the wind. His withered hide was burned the color of old leather by the sun, and his brushy beard was stained yellow about the chin. He wore a basket hat and a loincloth of rough homespun that resembled burlap, his only clothing except for sandals and a goatskin water bag.

He watched the dust speck until it passed through the village of Sanly Bowitts and departed again by way of the road leading past the mesa.

"Ah!" snorted the hermit, his eyes beginning to burn. "*His* empire shall be multiplied, and there shall be no end of peace: *he* shall sit upon the throne of David, and upon *his* kingdom . . ."

Suddenly he went down the arroyo like a cat, bounding from stone to stone and sliding most of the way. The dust from his rapid descent plumed high on the wind and wandered away.

At the foot of the mesa he vanished into the mesquite and settled down to wait. Soon he heard the rider approaching at a lazy trot, and he began slinking toward the road to peer out through the brush. The pony appeared from around the bend, wrapped in a thin dust shroud. The hermit darted into the trail and threw up his arms.

"Ola allay!" he shouted, and as the rider halted, he darted forward to seize the reins and frown anxiously up at the man in the saddle.

His eyes blazed for a moment. "For a Child is born to us, and a Son is given us. . . ." But then the anxious frown melted away into sadness. "It's not *Him!*" he grumbled irritably at the sky.

The rider had thrown back his cowl and was laughing. The hermit blinked angrily at him for a moment. Recognition dawned.

"Oh," he grunted. "*You!* I thought you'd be dead by now.

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What are you doing out here?"

"I brought back your prodigal, Benjamin," said Father Jerome. He tugged at a leash and the blue-headed goat trotted up from behind the pony. It bleated and strained at the leash upon seeing the hermit. "And . . . I thought I'd pay you a visit."

"The animal is the poet's," the hermit grunted. "He won it in a game of chance, although he cheated miserably. Take it back to him, and let me counsel you against meddling in worldly swindles that don't concern you. Good day." He turned toward the arroyo.

"Wait, Benjamin. Take your goat, or I'll give it to some peasant. I won't have it wandering around the abbey and bleating into the chapel."

"It's not a goat," the hermit said crossly. "It's the beast which your prophet saw, and it was made for a woman to ride. I suggest you curse it and drive it into the desert. You notice, however, that it divideth the hoof and cheweth the cud." He started away again.

The abbot's smile faded. "Benjamin, are you really going back up that hill without even a 'hello' for an old friend?"

"Hello," the Old Jew called back, and marched indignantly on. After a few steps he stopped to glance over his shoulder. "You needn't look so hurt," he snapped. "It's been five years since you've troubled yourself to come this way, 'old friend.' Hah!"

"So that's it!" muttered the priest. He dismounted and hurried after the Old Jew. "Benjamin, Benjamin, I would have come . . . I have not been free . . ."

The hermit stopped. "Well, Jerome, since you're here . . ."

Suddenly they laughed and embraced.

"It's good, you old grump," said the hermit.

"*I* a grump?"

"Well, I'm getting cranky too, I guess. The last century has been a trying one for me."

"I hear you've been throwing rocks at the novices who come hereabouts for their Lenten fast in the desert. Can this be true?" He eyed the hermit with mock reproof.

"Only pebbles!"

"Sacrilegious old pretzel!"

"Now, now, Jerome. One of them once mistook me for a distant relative of mine — name of Leibowitz. He thought I had been sent to deliver him a message. I don't want it to happen again, so I throw pebbles at them sometimes. Hah! I won't be mistaken for *that* kinsman again, for he stopped being a kinsman of mine."

The priest looked puzzled. "Leibowitz? The founder of our order, you mean? Mistook you . . . what on Earth are you talking about?"

Benjamin repeated it in a mocking singsong: "Mistook me for Leibowitz, the founder of your order, and so I throw pebbles at them."

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The abbot looked thoroughly perplexed. "Mistook you . . . but Saint Leibowitz was martyred twelve centuries ago. How could . . ." He broke off and peered warily at the old hermit. "Now, Benjamin, let's don't start *that* tale wagging again. You haven't lived twelve cent —"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the Old Jew. "I didn't say it happened twelve centuries ago. It was only six centuries ago. Long after your saint was dead, and that's why it's so preposterous. But of course, your novices were more devout in those days, and more suggestible. I think 'Francis' was this one's name. Young idiot! I throw pebbles at them all now, just to make sure."

The abbot gaped at him as they walked through the mesquite toward the water hole, leading the horse and goat. *Francis*, he thought, *Francis* . . . that would be Brother Francis Gerard of Utah, who, so the story went, had encountered a pilgrim in the desert, a pilgrim whom he had taken to be an angel or an apparition of Saint Leibowitz, and the pilgrim had revealed to him certain relics that later proved to be authentic and dating back to the lifetime of the Saint. But six centuries ago . . . and now this crazy old gaffer was claiming to have been the pilgrim!

"That was during my earlier career, of course," the Old Jew went on, "and perhaps such a mistake was understandable."

"Earlier career?"

"Wanderer."

"How do you expect me to believe such nonsense?"

"Hmm-*nn*. The poet believes me."

"Certainly," the priest snapped. "He couldn't possibly allow himself to believe in the evocation of a saint. Especially when a much more worldly explanation is offered him — such as an immortal old hermit. Bah!"

Benjamin chuckled wryly, and Jerome watched him lower a leaky bark cup into the well, empty it into his water skin, and lower it again for more. The water was cloudy and alive with creeping uncertainties as was the Old Jew's stream of memory. Or *was* his memory uncertain? Playing games with us all? wondered the priest. In everything except his delusion of longevity, old Benjamin seemed sane enough, in his own wry way.

"Drink?" the hermit offered, holding out the cup.

The priest suppressed a shudder, but he drained the murky liquid so as not to offend.

"Not very particular, are you?" said Benjamin, watching him critically. "Wouldn't touch it myself." He patted the waterskin. "For the animals."

The abbot gagged slightly.

"You've changed," said Benjamin, still watching him. "You're pale as cheese, and wasted."

"I've been ill."

"So it appears. Come up to my

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shack, if the climb won't wear you out."

"I'll be all right. It's just a little trouble I had the other day. Our physician told me to rest. Bah! I wouldn't listen to him, except that we have a very important guest coming soon, and I've got to see it through. So I'm resting."

Benjamin grinned back over his shoulder as they climbed the arroyo. He waggled his grizzly head. "Riding ten miles across the desert — that's rest?"

"For me it is. And — I've been wanting to see you, Benjamin."

"What will the villagers say?" the Old Jew asked mockingly. "They'll think we've become reconciled, and that will destroy both our reputations."

"Our reputations have never been honored in the market place, so there is nothing to be destroyed there."

"True." But he added cryptically: "for the present."

"Still waiting, Old Jew?"

"Certainly!" the hermit snapped.

The climb became tiring to the abbot. His seizure had weakened him, and twice they stopped to rest. By the time they reached the table land, he was dizzy and leaning on the spindly hermit for support. A dull fire burned in his chest, warning against further exertion, but there was none of the angry clenching that had come before.

A flock of the blue-headed mutants scattered at the approach of a stranger and fled into straggly mesquite. Oddly, the mesa was more verdant than the surrounding desert, although there was no visible supply of moisture.

"This way, Jerome. My mansion."

The Old Jew's hovel was a single room, windowless and stone-walled, its rocks stacked loosely as a fence, and with wide chinks for the wind to blow through. Its low roof was a flimsy patchwork of poles, most of them crooked, covered with a heap of brush and thatch and goatskins.

There was a sign painted in Hebrew letters beside the door, and because of its size and apparent intent to advertise, Father Jerome snickered and asked: "Attract much trade, Benjamin? What does it say?"

"Hah! What should it say? It says 'Tents Mended Here.' "

The priest snorted his disbelief.

"All right, doubt me. But if you don't believe *that*, you certainly wouldn't believe what's written on the *other* side of the sign."

"Facing the wall?"

"Obviously facing the wall."

"You turn it over sometimes."

"Turn it *over*? You think I'm *crazy*? In times like *these*?"

"What does the other side say?"

"Hmmmm-*hnnnn!*" the hermit sing-songed, refusing to answer. "But come on in, you who can't read signs from the underside."

"There is a wall in the way."

"There always was, wasn't there?"

The priest sighed. "All right,

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Benjamin, I know what was commanded to be written 'in the entry and on the door' of your house. But only *you* would think of turning it face down."

"Face *inward*," corrected the hermit. "As long as there are tents to be mended in Israel — but let's not begin teasing each other until you're rested. I'll get you some milk, and you tell me about this visitor that's worrying you."

"There's wine in my bag if you want some," said the abbot, falling with relief onto a mound of skins. "But I'd rather not talk about Don Thaddeo."

"Oh. *That* one."

"You've heard of him? Tell me, how is it you've always managed to know everything and everybody without stirring from this hill?"

"One hears, one sees," the hermit said cryptically.

"Tell me, what do you think of him?"

"Hah, he is a pain. A birth-pain, perhaps, but a pain."

"Birth-pain? You really think we have a new Renaissance on our hands?"

"Hmmm-*hnnnn*."

"Stop smirking mysteriously, Old Jew, and give me your opinion. You're bound to have one. You always do. Why is your confidence always so hard to get? Aren't we friends?"

"On some grounds, on some grounds. But we have our differences, you and I."

"What have our differences got to do with Don Thaddeo and a renaissance we both hope for? Don Thaddeo is a secular scholar, and rather remote from our differences."

Benjamin shrugged eloquently. "Differences. Secular scholars," he echoed, tossing out the words like discarded apple cores. "*I* have been called a 'secular scholar' at various times by certain people, and sometimes I've been staked, stoned, and burned for it."

"Bah! You've never . . ." The priest stopped, frowning sharply. Benjamin was peering at him suspiciously, and his smile had gone cold. *Now*, thought the priest, he is looking at me as if I were one of *Them* — whatever formless "Them" it was that drove him here to solitude. Staked, stoned, and burned? Father Jerome doubted the claim. Or did he mean "I" as in "I, my people"?

"Benjamin," the abbot said softly. "I am Jerome. Torquemada is dead. I was born seventy-odd years ago, and pretty soon I'll die. I have loved you, old man, and when you look at me, I wish you would see Jerome, and only Jerome, and no other."

Benjamin wavered for a moment, then relaxed. His eyes seemed suddenly wet. "I — sometimes — forget," he wheezed.

"And sometimes you forget that Benjamin is only Benjamin, and not all Israel?" the priest hazarded.

"Never!" snapped the hermit, eyes blazing again. "For five thou-

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sand years, I —" He stopped and closed his mouth tightly.

"Why?" Jerome whispered almost in awe. "Why do you take the burden of a people and a past upon yourself alone?"

The hermit's eyes flared a brief warning, but he swallowed a throaty sound and lowered his face into his hands. "You fish in dark waters."

"Forgive me."

"The burden — it was pressed upon me by others." He looked up slowly. "Should I have refused to take it?"

The priest caught his breath slightly, and for a time there was no sound in the shanty but the wind. What divinely inspired madness was this? The Jewish community was thinly scattered in these times, and an old Israelite like Benjamin might wander for years without finding others of his people, and it would not be hard for such a wanderer to become convinced that he was *the last*, the one, the only. And being the last, he was no longer Benjamin, but Israel, and upon his heart weighed the history of five thousand years, no longer remote, but become as the history of his own lifetime.

But I too am a member of a oneness, a continuity, a congregation, he thought, and mine too have been despised by the world. The distinction between congregation and self was clear to the priest however. To Benjamin, it had grown obscure. A burden pressed upon him by others, he said.

Suppose every man who was branded "Jew," "Catholic," "Vissarionist" — or any other name spoken in derision or hate — had *accepted* the illogic which called him to task not only for himself but for every member of his race or faith, and for their actions as well as his own? Suppose . . .

The abbot tested it on himself, as a man might test the edge of a blade with his thumb: *I am a Christian monk and priest, and I am therefore accountable before God for the actions and deeds of every monk and priest who breathed and walked the Earth in the last three thousand years, as well as for acts of my own.*

He shivered and began shaking his head. No. It sliced the thumb, this blade. He didn't even like to test it. Too much for any man to bear, save Christ. To be cursed for a faith was burden enough. But to take with it the implied responsibility for all acts, past and present, committed by all individuals of one's congregation since its birth — to *try* to carry such a burden . . . as Benjamin was trying?

And yet, his own Faith told him the burden was there. The burden impressed by a fiend crying in mockery: "Man!" at man. "Man!" — calling him to account for the deeds of his kind since Adam, a burden impressed upon every generation from the opening of the womb that spawned it; although it was easy to resist awareness of the burden, easy to refuse belief in it — for

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a time. And yet, the burden was just, just for a race that had initiated the first evil and then continued it. The yoke was hard. His Faith told him again that the burden had been lifted from him by One Whose image hung over His altars on a cross, although the burden's imprint was still there. The imprint was an easier yoke, compared to the full weight of the original blackness. But he could not bring himself to say it to the old man, since the old man already knew he believed it. Benjamin was looking for Another. And the last old Hebrew sat alone on a mountain and did penance for Israel and waited for the Messiah, and waited, and waited, and . . .

And there was nothing to be said to him. It was a rare bravery. *Any* man could look back on ancestral glories and ancestral virtues and ancestral triumphs and proudly feel, as an heir of Man, a sense of sharing, a pride of title, a delight of ownership in history. But how angrily the *same* man would disclaim personal responsibility for yesterday's genocides and rapes, how quickly deny the black weight of Adam's guilt upon him, and become outraged at the charge of "Guilty by Reason of Birthright" and disclaim oneness with Man rather than accept it — even though he had accepted with pride the equally valid judgment of "Courageous and Noble by Reason of Birthright" and had smiled with a justifiable pride at sharing the *bright* heritage. But Benjamin had the bright *and* the black upon him as if it were his own personal lifetime, and if it made him a little mad . . .

"God bless you for a brave fool, even a wise fool, Benjamin."

"Hmmm-*hnnnn!* Wise fool!" mimicked the hermit. "You always *were* one for paradox and mystery, weren't you, Jerome?" He smiled sourly at the abbot.

"To sense the responsibility is wisdom. But to think you can carry it alone is folly."

"Not madness?"

"Perhaps a little, but a brave madness."

"Then I will tell you a small secret. I have known all along that I can't carry it. But are we talking about the same thing?"

The priest shrugged. "You would call it the burden of being Chosen. I would call it the burden of Original Guilt. In either case, the implied responsibility is the same, although we might tell different versions of it, and disagree violently in words about words about what we mean *in* words by something that isn't really meant in words at all . . . since it's something that's meant in the dead silence of a heart."

Benjamin chuckled. "For a man who makes much of words and enlists them most cunningly in the defense of a God I gave you — although *I* never felt He needed such defending, myself — you dismiss words very wordily, Jerome."

"Stop cackling, you reprobate."

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"But you use words so fluently in addressing your Trinity."

The priest reddened.

"Touch!" yelped Benjamin, bouncing up and down. "But never mind. I use them too in addressing my Unity, and I'm never quite sure He and I mean the same thing either. I suppose you can't be blamed, for it must be even more confusing with Three."

"Blasphemous old cactus! I really wanted your opinion of Don Thaddeo and the times."

"Why do you seek opinions of a poor old anchorite?"

"Because, Benjamin-bar-Joshua, if all these years of waiting for One-who-isn't-coming haven't brought you wisdom, at least they've made you shrewd."

The Old Jew closed his eyes, lifted his face ceilingward, and smiled cunningly. "Insult me," he said in mocking tones, "rail at me, bait me, persecute me — but you know what I'll say?"

"You'll say 'hmmm-*hnnn*!' "

"No! I say I do not care to prophesy."

"Bah!"

"Until you tell me more about what troubles you, Jerome."

"It all began with Brother Kornhoer's lamp."

"Lamp? Oh, the poet mentioned it. He prophesied it wouldn't work."

"The poet, as usual, was wrong. So they tell me."

"Ah . . . ?" Benjamin fell easily into the role of sympathetic confidant, and the priest spoke at length of his fears, and the hermit, mender of tents, listened in long and gloomy silence until the sun had begun to leak through the chinks in the west wall to paint glowing shafts in the dusty air.

"Since the death of the last civilization, learning has been our special province, Benjamin, and we have kept it. But now? It is like the predicament of the shoemaker who tries to sell shoes in a village of shoemakers."

The hermit smiled. "It could be done, if he manufactures a special and superior type of shoe."

"That disrupts the analogy. Truth is the content of learning, and you cannot have a special and superior kind of truth, since there is only one."

"But you might have a special and superior method of discovering it."

"I'm afraid the secular scholars already lay claim to such a method."

"Then go out of the shoemaking business, before you are ruined."

"A possibility," the abbot admitted. "It's unpleasant to think of it, however. For twelve centuries, the Albertian Order of Saint Leibowitz has dedicated itself to keeping one little island of reason in an unreasoning age. It's been a thankless task, but a hallowed one. It's been our reason for existing as a distinct order, our purpose. It's possible that the time will soon be at hand when we're finished. Then what? Tradi-

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tion has an impetus apart from purpose. It's hard to think that it's all over. I can't think it."

"And so you try to best the other shoemakers by making electrical miracles in your basement?"

"I must admit it looks that way. And perhaps is."

"And what will you do next to keep ahead of the secular universities? Build a flying machine? Or revive the *machina analytica?* Or perhaps you mean to excel in theoretical discourses in Natural Philosophy."

"You shame me, Old Jew. We are monks of Christ first, and these things are for others to attempt."

"I wasn't sha ng you. I see nothing inconsistent in monks of Christ building flying machines, although it would be more like them to build a praying machine."

"Wretch! I do my order a disservice by sharing a confidence with you!"

Benjamin chuckled. "I have no sympathy for you. The books you saved may be hoary with age, but they were written by children of the world, and they will be taken from you by children of the world, and you had no business meddling with them in the first place. The Book I gave you should have been enough for you. And now you will just have to take the consequences."

"Consequences?"

"I will not try to foresee them until after I've seen this electrical marvel and had a better look at this Don Thaddeo, who begins to interest me. I can't tell you what is going to happen to you until I've examined the entrails of the new era in better detail."

"Well, you won't see the lamp because you won't come to the abbey. And you won't see Don Thaddeo because he comes from the other direction; he'll miss your ambush entirely — for which he should be most grateful to Providence. And if you wait to examine the entrails of an era after it's already born, it's too late to prophesy its birth."

"Nonsense. Probing the womb of the future too much is not good for the child. I shall wait, and then I shall prophesy that it *was* born, and whether it was what I was waiting for."

"And what are you waiting for? An Era or a King?"

"Hmmm-*hmnn!* It is eno h that I wait."

"Your Messiah isn't coming, Benjamin."

"To tell you the truth, I don't much expect Him either, but I was commissioned to wait, and — *hmmnn* — I wait." He paused, his twinkling eyes narrowed to slits. He leaned forward with sudden eagerness. "Jerome — bring Don Thaddeo past the foot of the mesa."

The priest recoiled slightly. "Accoster of pilgrims!" he snorted. "Molester of novices! I will send you the poet, and may he descend upon you and rest forever! Bring the don to your lair? Outrageous!"

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"Please, for a friend —"

"No!"

Benjamin sighed. "Very well. Forget that I asked it . . . but if only he will be on our side this time, and not with the *others!*"

"Others, Benjamin?"

"They go by the names of Manasses and Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar, by the names of various bureaus and sections, and more recently by the name of Hannegan. Samuel warned us against them before he gave us one, and they are most dangerous when wise men are available to be their viziers. Take care to see that this new crop of free-lance philosophers stays out of the kings' employ, and that is all the advice I'll give you."

"Well, Benjamin, I've had about enough of you for another five years, and I think —"

"Insult me, rail at me, bait me —"

"Stop it. I'm going."

"So? And how's the ecclesiastical belly fixed for the ride."

"My stomach . . ." The abbot paused to explore. "It's a wreckage, naturally," he complained, although he had seldom felt as healthy recently. "How else *would* it be?"

"True. God is merciful, but He is also just."

"Goodby, old man. We may never meet again, but after Brother Kornhoer re-invents the flying machine, I'll send up some novices to drop rocks on you."

They embraced affectionately, and the Old Jew led him to the edge of the mesa. Benjamin stood wrapped in a prayer shawl — its fine fabric made an odd contrast with the rough burlap of his loincloth — while the priest climbed down to the trail and rode back toward the abby. The priest could still see him standing there at sundown, his spindly figure silhouetted against the twilight sky as he bowed and munched a prayer over the desert.

"*Mememto, Domine, omnium famulorum tuorum,*" the abbot whispered in response, adding: "And may he win the poet's eyeball at mumble-peg."

VI

"I can tell you definitely that there will be war," said the messenger from the Vatican. "Laredo's forces are entirely committed to the Plains. Mad Bear has broken camp, and there's a running cavalry battle — nomad style — all over the Plains. But the State of Chihuahua is threatening Laredo from the south, and Hannegan is preparing to send forces to the Rio Grande. With the Laredan's full approval, of course. Hah. Goraldi is a doddering fool."

"Has he been warned of Texarkana's treachery?" asked the abbot.

The messenger smiled. "The Vatican diplomatic service is always careful to avoid spreading confidential information between secular states, lest we be accused of espionage. It is not our practice to

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uh . . . snitch on the nefarious plans of —"

"Was the Laredan king warned?" the abbot demanded crossly.

"Of course he was warned. He accused our man of lying, and said the Church was trying to increase its power by creating suspicion and dissension between nations. The idiot even told Hannegan."

The abbot sucked in a slow breath. "And Hannegan's reaction . . . ?"

The messenger hesitated. "I suppose I can tell you — Monsignor Marcus Apollo is under arrest, and his diplomatic files have been seized. There is a possibility that His Holiness may order the country placed under interdict, and forbid the saying of Mass until the nuncio is released. Hannegan has already been excommunicated, but that doesn't seem to bother many people. Texarkana is about eighty percent cultist anyhow, and the Catholicism of its ruling circles has always been a thin veneer."

"So now Apollo . . ." Father Jerome shook his head sadly.

"I don't see how your Don Thaddeo is going to get across the Plains with his skin. It seems clear why he didn't want to come in the first place."

The abbot's frown was pained. "If our refusal to send the material to his university leads to his getting killed en route . . ." He chewed his lip for a moment. The world could ill afford to lose such a man in these times, and the abbot felt a knot of remorse. "But why were you sent to tell me this?" he asked. "We're in the domain of Denver, and I can hardly see how this could affect —"

"Ah! But this is only the beginning. Hannegan hopes eventually to unite the continent. With Laredo firmly leashed, he will have broken the encirclement that's kept him in check. And the next move is against Denver."

"But I should think that would involve supply lines across nomad country. It seems impossible."

"It won't be, when the time comes," the messenger said moodily. "Hannegan's plans for the herdsmen peoples is devilish. Mad Bear can handle the Laredan cavalry, but what he won't be able to handle is a cattle epidemic. The tribes haven't discovered it yet, but when Laredo set out to punish the nomads for border raiding, the troops drove several thousand head of diseased cattle ahead of them. They're mingling with the nomad's herds. It was Hannegan's idea. The result will be famine, and then it will be easy to set tribe against tribe by making taboo foods available. We don't know all the details, but the goal is a nomad legion under a puppet chieftain, armed by Texarkana, loyal to Hannegan, ready to sweep west to the mountains. If it comes to pass, this region will get the first breakers."

"But *why?* Surely Hannegan doesn't expect the barbarians to be

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dependable troops, or capable of holding an empire once they finish mutilating it!"

"No, Father. But the nomad culture will be disrupted, Denver will be shattered. Then Hannegan can pick up the pieces."

"What then?"

"We don't know. It's possible that the ultimate goal has nothing to do with the West. It will not be a rich empire, but it will be secure on all flanks, and might be in a position to strike east or northeast. But we can't know. His plans may collapse before it comes to that. This region, however, may be in danger of being overrun in the not-too-distant future. Steps should be taken to secure the abbey, and in the next few months I have been instructed to discuss with you the best way we might insure the safety of your relics and records."

Father Jerome felt the blackness beginning to gather. After twelve centuries, a little hope in the world. And then came an illiterate prince to ride roughshod over it with a barbarian horde and . . .

His fist exploded onto the desktop. "We kept them outside our walls for a thousand years," he growled, "and we can keep them out for another thousand. This abbey was under seige three times during the Bayring influx, and once again during the Vissarionist disputes. We will keep the books safe. We've kept them that way for quite some time."

"But this time there is an added hazard, Father."

"What may it be?"

"A bountiful supply of gunpowder and grapeshot."

The Feast of the Assumption had come and gone by the time the expected party of horsemen appeared out of the east. Before the dust plume had resolved itself into separate riders from whose muskets fluttered the pennants of Hannegan II, the abbot's apprehensions had grown beyond the bounds of his ability to rationalize or explain them. This, he told himself, is only a visiting scholar, a man uninterested in politics or princes, a man whose province was the intellect, a secular colleague, a potential friend. There is no reason to fear him. There is every reason to welcome him with great rejoicing, for is he not the heir of our founder, the man for whom the Holy Leibowitz and his monks had saved some small portion of knowledge from the last civilization, that Man again might know?

And yet . . .

"Man the watchtowers, brethren," the abbot commanded. "Watch their party carefully, and count their arms. Report immediately on anything strange."

Startled monks hurried to obey.

An excited crowd of novices had gathered in the courtyard to greet the distinguished don with gifts, flowers, and song. The ancient walls were gaily garnished with paper

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wreaths and the national colors of Texarkana. The abbot emerged on a balcony overlooking the crowd and cried out for quiet.

"The rule of silence is now imposed upon the congregation," he commanded.

Incredulous faces stared up at him. His hands were trembling, and he thrust them into the sleeves of his robe.

"Religious silence will be observed at all hours," he continued, "with the usual exceptions of the recreation hour, during services, and when giving or receiving work instructions. And there is an additional requirement. No brother may converse with our guests at *any* time, except as duty or courtesy may demand it."

A low gasp came from the monks below, but the abbot had plunged, and he waded doggedly on.

"And avoid particularly certain subjects, even if our guests bring them up. Politics, matters of liturgy — traditions of our order, and anything pertaining to the Faith — if they question you, refer them to one of the priests or a master scholar. Stay out of any discussion of a field of knowledge *which is properly the domain of natural philosophers!* Saint Augustine warned about objecting to theoretical —"

A light touch on his arm interrupted. It was Father Gault. The abbot frowned. "Do you take exception to my ruling?"

But the assistant had not been listening. "The watchmen —" he whispered. "The party from Texarkana —" He seemed confused.

"What's wrong?" hissed the abbot. "I thought you were going to ride out to meet them?"

"We were, but — well — perhaps you'd better come see for yourself."

Father Jerome nodded impatiently. "That's all," he said to the glum throng in the courtyard. The choral group was already breaking up, the bearers of gifts dispersing rather than greet the visitors under a pall of silence.

"What is it?" the abbot asked crossly. "I don't see any . . ."

"Look carefully, Father," urged Gault.

The horsemen had stopped perhaps a quarter of a mile from the abbey. Father Jerome blinked his aging eyes and squinted across the hot dry terrain. Dust from the horses' hooves had drifted away to the north. The party seemed to have paused for a parley.

"There seem to be twenty or thirty of them, don't there?" he muttered. "How will we ever accommodate so many?"

"I don't think we will be accommodating the ones in wolfskins," the younger priest said stiffly.

"Plains people! Nomads!"

"Yes. That's why we hesitated to go out to meet them."

"But what . . . ?"

The parley apparently had ended. Men waved, and the group split in two. The larger party galloped back

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toward the east while the remaining horsemen watched briefly, then reined around and trotted toward the abbey.

"Six or seven of them — some in uniform," the abbot murmured.

"The don and his party, I'd guess."

"But the nomads! Why . . . ?"

"It would appear that they came as guides," Gault said darkly. "How neighborly of the lion to lie with the lamb! What charity! Have they stopped murdering our emissaries, by the way?"

"Not that I've heard," the abbot answered gloomily.

The riders were approaching the gates. Father Jerome swallowed a dry place in his throat. "We'd better go welcome them, Father Gault."

By the time the priests had descended from the wall, the travelers were at the gates. A man detached himself from the others, trotted forward, dismounted, and presented his papers.

"Jerome of Pecos, Abbas?"

The abbot bowed. "I am he. Don Thaddeo, welcome in the name of Saint Leibowitz, his abbey, and forty generations who have waited for you to come. Be at home. We serve you." The words were heartfelt, for they had been saved many years for such a moment. He looked up slowly, and their glances locked for a moment. The warmth faded quickly. The scholar's eyes . . .

Cold searching gray. Hungry and skeptical. Proud.

He had hoped that this moment would be as a bridge across a gulf of twelve centuries, and that the last martyred scientist of that earlier age would, through him, clasp hands with tomorrow. There was a gulf, that much was plain. But the abbot felt suddenly that he belonged not to this age at all, but had been left stranded somewhere on a sandbar in Time's river, and that there wasn't ever really a bridge at all.

"Come," he said gently. "Brother Visclair will attend to your horses."

VII

"'*And so it was in those days*," said the reader, "*that the princes of Earth had hardened their hearts against the Law of the Lord, and of their pride there was no end. And each of them thought within himself that it was better for all to be destroyed than for the will of other princes to prevail over him. For the mighty of the Earth did contend among themselves for supreme power over all; by stealth and treachery and deceit did they seek to rule, and of war they feared greatly and did tremble; for the Lord God had suffered the wise men of those times to know the means by which the world itself might be destroyed, and into their hands was given the sword of the Archangel wherewith Lucifer had been cast down, that men and princes might fear God and humble themselves before the Most High. But they were not humbled.*

"'*And Satan spoke unto a certain prince, saying: "Fear not to use the*

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sword, for the wise men have deceived you in saying that the world would be destroyed thereby. Listen not to the counsel of weaklings, for they fear you exceedingly, and they serve your enemies by staying your hand against them. Strike, and know that you shall be king over all of them."

" 'And the prince did heed the word of Satan, and he summoned all of the wise scientists of that realm and called upon them to give him counsel as to the ways in which the enemy might be destroyed without bringing down the wrath upon his own kingdom. But many of the wise men said, "Lord, it is not possible, for your enemies also have the sword which we have given you, and the fieriness of it is as the flame of Hell and as the fury of the sun-star from whence it was kindled."

" 'And the prince was angry because of their answer, and he suspected them of betraying him, and he sent his spies among them to tempt them and challenge their loyalty, and the wise men became afraid, and some among them changed their answers so as not to invoke his wrath upon them. But the wisest among them would not change their words to please him. Three times he asked them, and three times they answered: "Nay, Lord, even your own people will perish if you do this thing." And his spies could find no cause against them, but the prince caused his spies to accuse them before the people and they were discredited. And being afraid, the less wise among his scientists counseled him according to his pleasure saying: "The weapons may be used, only do not exceed such and such a limit, or all will surely die."

" 'And the prince smote the cities of his enemies with fire, and for three days and three nights did his metal birds rain wrath upon them. Over each city a sun appeared and was brighter than the sun of heaven, and at once did the city wither and melt as wax under the torch, and the people thereof did stop in the streets and their skin smoked and they became as faggots thrown on the coals. And when the fury of the sun had faded, the city was in flames, and a great roaring out of the sky came to crush it utterly. Poisonous fumes fell over all the land, and the land was aglow by night with the afterfire and the curse of the afterfire which caused a scurf on the skin and made the hair to fall and the blood to die in the veins.

" 'And a great stink went up from Earth even unto Heaven. Like unto Sodom and Gomorrah was the Earth and the ruins thereof, even in the land of that certain prince, for his enemies did not withhold their vengeance; and the stink of the carnage was exceedingly offensive unto God. And the Lord spoke unto the prince, saying "What burnt offering is this you have prepared me? What savor is this that arises from the place of holocaust? Have you made me a holocaust of sheep or goats, or offered a calf unto God? What have you done?" But the prince answered not, and God said, "You have made me a holocaust of

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my sons." And the prince said, "Why did you not stay my hand, as the hand of Abraham?" And the Lord slew him, and there was pestilence in the Earth, and madness walked among men. Wherever there were princes and wise men, the multitudes set upon them and killed them, saying: "These are the ones who brought this curse upon us." Many were stoned, and there was a great slaughter of scribes and wise men, and their books were put to the torch lest man should again taste forbidden knowledge. Thus were the crimes of princes compounded by the people who survived. The name of wisdom was blasphemed, and God abandoned the people to darkness.

" 'But there was in that time a man whose name was Leibowitz, who in his youth had loved wisdom more than God. And seeing that wisdom was good, but had not saved the world, he turned to the Lord, crying . . .'"

"That will do," murmured the abbot to the monk who read the ancient account. "That will be all, I think. Thank you, Brother."

The reader bowed and slipped quietly out of the study.

"And that is your only account of it?" asked Don Thaddeo, smiling tightly at the priest.

"Don't hesitate to be skeptical of the details," Father Jerome answered. "The text is apochryphal. The author was merely inclined to scriptural mimicry. It was written a few decades after the death of Saint Leibowitz. It was probably one of the first accounts written after it became safe to write again. The author was a young monk who had not lived through the destruction himself, but had gotten it second hand from Saint Leibowitz' followers — the original monks who had done the memorizing and later transcribing of pre-Deluge works. There is probably no single coherent account of the Flame Deluge in existence anywhere, but most of the accounts agree that the cities were wiped out almost overnight, that whole continents were scorched clean, and that only a small fraction of the population survived. Also there is agreement that the remnants of the population turned on their leaders and teachers and philosophers, and it was not safe for a parent to teach a child to read and write for fear of his being killed by the young wolfpacks of orphaned world-haters that ran wild everywhere. You see, the first monks of our order had grown to maturity before the Deluge, and most of them were secular scholars who sought sanctuary in the Church. Our most ancient writings are their transcriptions of earlier works. Obviously, their accuracy is as good as the transcribers' ability to memorize and retain, and no better."

"Very interesting," said the don. "I do not doubt the sincerity of your beliefs."

The abbot frowned at the window. Oddly put, he thought. "You asked about the origins of our collection," he reminded the scholar.

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"Of course. When may I begin examining these relics?"

"Immediately, if it pleases you."

The scholar sighed and smiled at the image of the saint in the corner. "Tomorrow will be soon enough. I would like to look around a bit."

The abbot assigned him a guide, and the scholar toured the abbey and murmured dutifully at its antiquities. Father Jerome watched nervously from his window as the don inspected the fortifications that had protected the community and its legacy for so many centuries. The priest could not help remembering Hannegan's plans for conquest, and the nomads who had accompanied the scholar's party to the vicinity of the abbey. The imprisonment of Marcus Apollo haunted his thoughts, and the growing persecution of the Church in other more powerful states of the east.

The monastery was isolated from the world, and its concerns were its own, and its monks lost awareness of the outside turmoil after a time of dedicated solitude. The visitors who came to the abbey usually belonged to one of two categories: prelates and scholars whose business was liturgical, canonical, ecclesiastical, or vagrants like the poet who had no business but the acceptance of charity. Except for petty skirmishing with such enfants terribles as the mayor of Sanly Bowitts, the monastics had few contacts with men of status and power in the world, and the importance of affairs political faded from their thoughts. Only the abbot strove to keep himself informed, but even so he felt the world impersonal and remote from the interests of his flock, and he took note of the times as a man might study a historical period not his own, for the times were not his own. The confusion he felt as he watched the don exploring the abbey was the discomposure attendant upon discovering the materiality of a thing remotely known — in short, the man was meat, and had a boil upon one elbow. He breathed, favored a game leg, and probably lost occasionally at chess — though apparently not to Father Gault. He was — and noticing the fact, the abbot was apprehensive — a man of the times and of a culture of the time. He was dated, and while the date was instant, Jerome was surprised to observe a scholar who was not detached from an age except in his own special work. I shall have to break myself, he thought, of thinking *scholar*, *therefore monk*.

That evening he summoned Father Gault to inquire after the events of the day. "Has the imposition of silence caused the easterners any embarrassment?" he asked.

Gault pondered briefly. "It has certainly embarrassed the brothers. Apparently they meant to form planetary ranks around him and make a cosmic orgy of questions and answers about his work."

"That's not what I meant. Has it embarrassed our guests?"

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"I doubt if they realize there's anything unusual in the imposition of the rule. Perhaps they feel that the congregation is avoiding them." He chuckled quietly. "The novices are inclined to turn red and lower their glances when the visitors pass, and then stare after them around corners and posts, and peep at them through the shrubbery. Don Thaddeo noticed it, and he's probably puzzled."

"I'll suspend the silence," said the abbot, "as soon as it's clear to the brothers that they are *not* to bark around his heels for intellectual scraps, or exploit his presence for their own elucidation."

"I think that's already clear to them. Your imposition of silence was something of a shock, especially to Brother Kornhoer's team." He paused timidly. "I must admit I myself was a little startled . . ."

The abbot chose to ignore his curiosity. "Let everyone understand that he is not to be treated as a celebrity or a champion home from the wars, and especially not as a hero figure. If he *is* the figure of an age we've worked and waited for, he won't be aware of it, and neither should we. Let him be treated as a distinguished guest, with due honor and courtesy and hospitality, but not adulation. Do you agree?"

"Emphatically," said the younger priest. "I don't understand our community of scholars these days. Formerly men yearned after knowledge like a distant lover. Now they are lustier about it. They grab her like a barmaid and tickle her ribs."

The abbot's eyebrows went up. "Your analogy makes me ask if all of your trips to the village of late have been — but never mind. You're thinking of Kornhoer and his lamp as reflecting a new attitude toward learning?"

Gault nodded. "I think it is inevitable. When the world doesn't want to put knowledge to work, the scholar's task is merely to know and save and love. Otherwise, to apply the knowledge is also a part of the task."

"But is it our task?"

"I haven't decided. Have you?"

"It may depend on how it is applied by Don Thaddeo and his colleagues. And what masters they serve."

"If it's a question of masters, we had better give Brother Kornhoer a carte blanche to apply whatever he can apply. Hannegan is master where the don holds chair."

"Perhaps, but Hannegan himself is a cunning and ambitious illiterate. Very likely he holds learning in contempt, but is willing to support the learned because it brings prestige. Princes often patronize the talented merely to dominate them. Of course, if Hannegan were to realize that the application of learning can be a source of power and wealth . . ."

"It is written," Gault murmured thoughtfully, "that Saint Leibowitz himself was in the employ of a prince at one time. He was even awarded a title of nobility, I believe."

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"I don't recall that."

"The prince was named 'Sam,' I believe. Addressed as Uncle."

"But the title of nobility. Are you sure?"

Gault nodded emphatically. "They awarded him the rank of 'Security Risk.'"

"What makes you think *that* was a title of nobility?"

"Well, all his colleagues immediately began praising him and paying him high tribute and made him president of a foundation."

"Oh."

"But others were apparently jealous, because the title was taken away from him afterwards."

"No!"

"'Cleared' was the word. It bespeaks the typical pettiness of all princes."

"Render unto Caesar," sighed the abbot.

The vaults were dimly filled with candlelight, and only a few dark-robed scholars moved about in the stalls. Brother Armbruster pored gloomily over his records in a puddle of lamplight in his cubbyhole at the foot of the stone stairway, and one lamp burned in the theology stall where a robed figure huddled over ancient manuscript; but it was morning, and most postulants and novices were on work assignments or in classes. The professed monks labored at their own duties about the abbey, in kitchen, classroom, garden, stable, and office, leaving the library nearly empty, usually until late afternoon. This morning, however, the vaults were comparatively crowded.

Three monks stood lounging in the shadows behind the new machine. They kept their hands tucked in their sleeves and watched a fourth monk who stood at the foot of the stairs. There was no talking, for the rule of silence was still in force. The fourth monk gazed patiently up toward a fifth monk who stood on the landing and watched the surface entrance to the stairs. Their vigil had lasted thus since sunrise. Brother Kornhoer brooded over his apparatus like an anxious parent, and when he could no longer find wires to wiggle and adjustments to make and remake, he retired to the theology lectern to read and wait. To speak a summary of last minute instructions to his crew was permissible under the rule, but he chose to maintain the hush, and if any thought of the coming moment as a personal climax crossed his mind as he waited, the scholarly inventor's expression gave no hint of it. Since the abbot himself had not bothered to watch a demonstration of the machine, Brother Kornhoer betrayed no symptoms of expecting applause from any quarter, and he had even overcome his tendency to glance reproachfully at Father Jerome.

A low hiss from the stairway alerted the basement again, although there had been several false alarms

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that morning. Clearly no one had informed the illustrious don that a marvelous invention awaited his inspection in the basement. Clearly, if it had been mentioned to him at all, its importance had been minimized. Obviously, Father Jerome was seeing to it that they all cooled their heels. These were the wordless significances exchanged by glances among them as they waited.

This time, the warning was not in vain. The monk who watched from the head of the stairs turned solemnly and bowed toward the fifth monk on the landing below. "*Dominus tecum*," he said softly.

The fifth monk turned and bowed toward the fourth monk at the foot of the stairs. "*Et cum spiritu tuo*," he murmured.

The fourth monk turned toward the three who lounged behind the machine. "*Sursum corda*," he announced.

"*Habemus ad Dominum*," chorused the group.

"*Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro*," called Brother Kornhoer, returning his book to its shelf with a rattling of chains.

"*Dignum et justum est*," responded his entire team as the vigil on the stairs descended to take their posts. Four monks manned the treadmill. The fifth monk hovered over the dynamo. The sixth monk climbed the shelf-ladder and took his seat on the top rung, his head bumping the top of the archway. He pulled a mask of smoke-blackened oily parchment over his face to protect his eyes, then felt for the lamp fixture and the thumbscrew, while Kornhoer watched him nervously from below.

"*Beatus vir, qui timet Dominum*," he said when he found the screw.

"*In mandatis ejus culpit nimis*," the inventor called to the fifth monk.

The fifth monk bent over the dynamo with a candle for one last look at the brush contacts. "*Potens in terra erit semen ejus*," he said at last, continuing the psalm.

"*Generatio rectorum benedicetur*," chorused the treadmill team, and set their shoulders to the turnstile beams.

Axles creaked and groaned. The wagon-wheel dynamo began to spin, its low whir becoming a moan and then a whine as the monks strained and grunted at the drive-mill. The guardian of the dynamo watched anxiously as the spokes blurred with speed and became a film. Then, gingerly, he licked two fingers and slapped them across the contacts. A spark snapped and he leaped back.

"*Gloria!*" he yelped, finishing lamely: "*et divitiae in domo ejus.*"

"CONTACT!" said Kornhoer, finishing the litany as Father Jerome, Don Thaddeo, and his clerk descended the stairs.

The monk on the ladder struck the arc. A sharp *spffft!* — and blinding light flooded the vaults with a brilliance that had not been seen in twelve centuries.

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The party stopped on the stairs. Don Thaddeo gasped an oath in his native tongue. He retreated a step. The abbot, having neither witnessed the testing of the device nor credited extravagant claims, blanched and stopped speech in mid-sentence. The don's clerk froze momentarily in panic and suddenly fled screaming "Fire!" in the courtyard.

The abbot made the Sign of the Cross. "I had not known!" he whispered.

The scholar, surviving the first shock of the flare, probed the basement with his gaze, noticing the drive-mill, the monks who strained at its spoke-beams. His eyes traveled along the wrapped wires, noticed the monk on the ladder, measured the meaning of the wagon-wheel dynamo and the monk who stood waiting with downcast eyes at the foot of the stairs.

"Incredible!" he breathed.

The monk at the foot of the stairs bowed in acknowledgment and depreciation. The blue-white glare cast knife-edged shadows in the room, and the candle flames became blurred wisps that seemed no longer luminous in the tide of light.

"Bright as a thousand torches," breathed the scholar. "It must be an ancient — but no! Unthinkable!"

He moved on down the stairs like a man in a trance. He stopped beside Kornhoer and gazed at him curiously for a moment, then passed on to the basement floor. Touching nothing, asking nothing, peering at everything, he wandered about the machinery, inspecting the dynamo, the wiring, the lamp itself.

"It just doesn't seem possible, but . . ."

The abbot recovered his senses and descended the stairs. "You're dispensed from the silence!" he hissed at Kornhoer. "Talk to him. I'm . . . a little dazed."

The monk brightened. "You like it, Father?"

"Ghastly!" wheezed the abbot.

The inventor's countenance sagged.

"It's a shocking way to treat a guest! It frightened the don's assistant out of his wits. I'm mortified!"

"Well, it *is* rather bright. . . ."

"Hellish! Go talk to him while I think of a way to apologize."

But the scholar had apparently made a judgment on the basis of his observations, for he stalked toward them swiftly. His face seemed strained, and his manner crisp.

"A lamp of electricity," he said. "How you have managed to keep it hidden for all these centuries . . . !" He choked slightly, and seemed to be fighting for self-control, as if he had been the victim of a monstrous practical joke. "After all these years of trying to arrive at a theory of . . . *Why* have you hidden it? Is there some religious significance . . . I mean, why did you let me see it now? And what . . ." Com-

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plete confusion stopped him. He shook his head and looked around as if for an escape.

"You misunderstand," Jerome said weakly, catching at Kornhoer's arm. "For the love of God, Brother, *explain!*"

But there was no balm could easily soothe an affront to professional pride, in any times.

VIII

After the unfortunate incident in the basement, the rule of silence was lifted; no further attempt was made to regulate communication between the monks and their guests, and the abbot sought by every possible means to make amends for that unhappy moment. Don Thaddeo gave no outward sign of rancor, and even offered his hosts an apology for his spontaneous judgment of the incident, after the inventor of the device gave the scholar a detailed account of its recent design and manufacture. But the apology succeeded only in convincing the abbot further that the blunder had been serious. It put the don in the position of a mountaineer who scaled an "unconquered" height only to find a rival's initials carved in the summit rock — and the rival hadn't told him in advance. It must have been shattering for him, thought Jerome, because of the way it was handled.

"Vanity is for shattering," remarked the wooden saint in the corner of his study.

"But he would not have to be vain to resent it."

"I meant *your* vanity, Jerome."

The abbot gulped. The wooden saint was always making remarks like that, and they stung. "If we have behaved vainly, it was for your sake," he answered testily.

"Wretch! *You* took up my burden, not *he*. Why were you all so eager to impress him with your accomplishments? For my sake?" The onetime scientist and priest fingered his hangman's noose and his smile became annoying to the abbot.

"I wish you would stop laughing at me once in awhile," he muttered. "I am only hoping to trap him into being grateful to you."

"Trap him into gratitude? Have you forgotten why I am laughing, Jerome? Look where I am standing."

The priest shuddered and lowered his eyes to the saint's feet. The image stood on a mound of faggots; and on the mound of kindling, books were heaped, and an odd device which was the sculptor's impression of something called a radiation counter. The priest could see no humor in the manner of Leibowitz' martyrdom.

"But I haven't forgotten," he admitted. But his shudder had silenced the fanciful voice of the woodcarving, and he nursed the renewed stirrings of his ulcer in silence.

The abbot would have removed the lamp from the basement forthwith, had not the don insisted with a

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firmness born perhaps of embarrassment that its light was of a superior quality and sufficiently bright for close scrutiny of those brittle and age-worn documents which tended to be inscrutable under candlelight. Having so insisted, he then discovered that it was necessary to keep at least four monks continuously employed at cranking the dynamo and adjusting the arc-gap; now he begged that the lamp be removed, and it was Jerome's turn to become insistent that it remain in place.

And so it was that the scholar began his researches at the abbey, continuously conscious of three novices exhausting themselves in his behalf at the turnstile and one novice inviting glare-blindness atop the ladder, a situation which caused the poet to versify scurrilously concerning the outrages perpetrated by two embarrassed people trying to appease each other.

For several days the don and his assistant studied the librarian's files, the monastery's records, and the physical envelope which contained the alleged treasures, as if by determining the validity of the oyster, they might establish the possibility of the pearl. Brother Kornhoer discovered the don's assistant on his knees in the entrance of the refectory, and for a moment he entertained the impression that the fellow was performing a spontaneous devotion before a Mary image in a wall niche, but a rattle of tools put an end to the illusion. The assistant laid a carpenter's level across the entranceway and measured the concave depression worn in the floor stones by centuries of monastic sandals.

"We're looking for ways of determining dates," he told Kornhoer when questioned. "This seemed like a good place to establish a standard for rate of wear, since the traffic's easy to estimate. Three meals per man per day since the stones were laid."

Kornhoer could not help but be impressed by their thoroughness, although the activity mystified him. "The abbey's architectural records are complete," he said. "They can tell you exactly when each building and wing was added. Why not save yourself some time?"

The man glanced up innocently. "My master has a saying: 'Nayol is without speech, and therefore never lies.' "

"Nayol?"

"One of the nature gods of the Red River people. He means it figuratively, of course. Objective evidence is the ultimate authority. Recorders may lie, but Nature is incapable of it." He noticed the monk's expression and added hastily: "No canard is implied. It is simply a doctrine of the don's that everything must be cross-referenced to the objective."

"A fascinating notion," murmured Kornhoer, and bent over to examine the man's sketch of a cross-

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section of the floor's concavity. "Why, it's shaped like what Brother Majek calls a normal distribution curve. How strange."

"Not strange. The probability of a footstep deviating from the centerline would tend to follow the normal error function."

Kornhoer was enthralled. "I'll call Brother Majek," he said.

The abbot's interest in his guests' inspection of the premises was less esoteric. "*Why*," he demanded of Gault, "are they making detailed drawings of our fortifications?"

The young priest looked surprised. "I hadn't heard of it. You mean Don Thaddeo —"

"No. The officers that came with him. They're going about it quite systematically."

"How did you find out?"

"The poet told me."

"The poet! Hah!"

"Unfortunately, he was telling the truth this time. He pickpocketed one of their sketches."

"You have it?"

"No, I made him return it. There's no keeping them from doing it, but I don't like it. It's ominous."

"I suppose the poet asked a price for the information?"

"Oddly enough, he didn't. The poet's taken an instant dislike to the don. He's gone around muttering to himself ever since they came."

"The poet has always muttered."

"But not in a serious vein."

"Why do you suppose they're making military layouts?"

Jerome made a grim mouth. "Unless we find out otherwise, we'll assume their interest is recondite and professional. As a walled citadel, the abbey has been a success. It's never been taken by seige or assault, and perhaps their professional admiration is aroused."

Father Gault gazed speculatively across the desert toward the east. "Come to think of it, if an army meant to strike west across the Plains, they'd probably have to establish a garrison somewhere in this region before marching on Denver." He thought for a few moments and began to look alarmed. "And here they'd have a fortress ready-made!"

"I'm afraid that's occurred to them."

"You think they were sent as spies?"

"No, no! I doubt if Hannegan ever heard of us. But they are here, and they are officers, and they can't help looking around and getting ideas. And now very likely Hannegan is *going* to hear about us."

"What do you intend doing?"

"I don't know yet."

"Why not talk to Don Thaddeo about it?"

"The officers aren't his servants. They were only sent as an escort to protect him. What can he do?"

"He's Hannegan's kinsman, and he has influence. If he finds our scholarship and our library valuable, he'd surely realize the insanity of any plan to seize the abbey for mili-

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tary purposes, even if he had no moral qualms about it. His influence might be an antidote."

The abbot nodded. "I'll think about a way to approach him on it. We'll watch what's going on for awhile first, though. We're not supposed to know Hannegan's schemes."

In the days that followed, Don Thaddeo completed his study of the oyster and, apparently satisfied that it was not a disguised clam, focused his attention on the pearl. The task was not simple. The original manuscripts that dated back to Leibowitzian times and the last age of enlightenment had been sealed in air-tight casks and locked in special storage vaults in the hope of preserving them indefinitely. Hand-copied facsimiles were available, but in the case of partially damaged or deteriorated works, it was impossible to trust the copyist's interpretation and eyesight.

Tons of facsimile copy were scrutinized. Chains rattled and clanked as the more precious documents came down from their shelves. The don's assistant assembled several pounds of notes. After the third day of it, the scholar's pace quickened, and his manner took on the eagerness of a hungry hound-pup catching scent of tasty game.

"Magnificent!" he laughed, vacillating between jubilation and amused incredulity. "Fragments from a Twentieth Century physicist! The equations are even consistent."

"Important subject matter?" asked Kornhoer breathlessly.

"I don't know yet. The mathematics is beautiful, but I don't know what physical quantities are represented. If it's a hoax, it's inspired. If it's authentic, we may be in unbelievable luck! In either case, it's magnificent. I must see the earliest possible copy of it."

Brother Armbruster groaned as another lead-sealed cask was rolled out of storage. To the librarian, each unsealing represented another twenty percent decrease in the probable lifetime of its contents, and he made no attempt to conceal his disapproval of the entire proceeding. To Armbruster, whose task in life was the preserving of books, the principal reason for the existence of books was that they might be preserved perpetually. Usage was secondary, and to be avoided if it threatened longevity.

Don Thaddeo's enthusiasm for his task waxed stronger as the days passed, and the abbot breathed easier as he watched the don's earlier skepticism melting away with each new discovery of some fragmentary pre-deluge science text. The scholar had left the intended scope of his investigations unclear, but now he went about his work with the crisp precision of a man with a plan, and Father Jerome decided to give the cock a roost to crow from in case he felt an impulse to shout glad tidings of dawn.

"The community is curious about

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your work," he told the scholar. "Would it be possible for you to tell us something about it in general terms? The congregation has been muttering because I haven't invited you to discourse, but I thought you might prefer to get the feel of the place first. Of course, if it's too technical for us to understand . . ."

The don's gaze seemed to clamp calipers on the abbot's cranium and measure it six ways. He smiled doubtfully. "I suppose it might be susceptible to simplification, but . . ." He shrugged his eyebrows and tried to look apologetic.

"Perhaps I'm still premature in suggesting it."

"No, as a matter of fact, we now have a fairly clear idea of where we're going and what we have to work with, although it will still take considerable time to finish. The pieces have to be fitted together, and they don't all belong to the same puzzle. We can't predict yet what we *can* glean from it, but we're fairly sure of what we *can't*. I'm happy to say it looks hopeful, and I have no objection to explaining it, but . . ." Again the doubtful shrug.

"What bothers you?"

The don seemed mildly embarrassed. "Only an uncertainty about my audience. I would not wish to offend . . ."

"But how could you offend? Isn't it a matter of natural philosophy or physical science?"

"Of course. But some people tend to have rather rigid ideas about the world, and tend to color it with religious . . . well, what I mean is . . ."

The priest saved him the trouble. "You can't help thinking of Galileo."

"Who?"

"Sorry, I forgot. A pre-deluge scientist. The secular historians tend to regard pre-deluge as too tangled for unraveling. But never mind that. If your subject matter is the physical world, how could you possibly offend anyone? Especially in this congregation. We've been waiting for a long time for the world to start taking an interest in itself again. And at the risk of seeming boastful, I might point out that we have a few rather clever amateurs at natural science right here in the abbey. There's Majek, and there's Kornhoer —"

"Kornhoer!" The don glanced up warily at the arc lamp and looked away blinking. "I can't understand it. . . ."

"The *lamp?* But surely —"

"No, no, not the lamp. The lamp's simple enough, once you get over the shock of seeing it really works. It *should* work. It would work on paper, assuming various undeterminables and guessing at some unavailable data. But the clean impetuous leap from vague hypothesis to a working model . . ." The don huffed, mingling admiration with outrage. "It's Kornhoer himself I don't understand. What's a

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man like that doing in a monastery?"

"Perhaps Brother Kornhoer might explain it to you," said the priest, struggling against an edge of stiffness in his voice.

Don Thaddeo's visual calipers began measuring the old man again. "If you feel no one would take offense at hearing non-traditional ideas, I would be glad to discuss our work. But some of it tends to conflict with established preju — uh . . . opinion."

"Good! Then it should be fascinating."

A time was agreed upon, and the priest felt a surge of relief. The esoteric gulf between Christian Monk and Secular Investigator of Nature was about to be narrowed. The cloudy veil of doubt and mistrustful hesitancy was to be parted, before it had a chance to congeal into a brick wall. *Full communication*, he thought, that's all that's really necessary. But then it occurred to him that he, Jerome, had been the first to resist communication, by imposing silence on the congregation even before the don's coming.

"Patience, Lord, with a well-meaning fool."

"But you can't ignore the officers and their sketch books," Father Gault reminded him.

"In honor of our learned guest and his party," announced the reader from the lectern in the refectory, "our ruler has commanded me to announce dispensation of abstinence for this meal. All religious may partake of the banquet honoring Don Thaddeo and his party, and conversation is permitted."

Suppressed vocal noises came from the robed ranks of the novices, sounding vaguely like strangled cheers. The reader's voice echoed hollowly in the high vaulted dining room whose ceiling was lost in brooding shadows above the puddles of candlelight that ran along the wooden tables. Candlelight blanched the faces of the robed legions who stood motionless behind their stools, waiting for the reader to finish the announcements and for the arrival of the guests. The tables were set. Food had not yet made an appearance, but large dining trays replaced the usual mush bowls to hint of a feast and set appetites yearning. The familiar milk mugs stayed in the pantry, their places taken by the best wine cups, and roses were scattered along the boards.

The abbot stopped in the corridor to wait for the reader to finish. He glanced at the special table which had been set for himself, Gault, and the scientist's party. Bad arithmetic in the kitchen, he thought. Eight places had been set. Three officers, the don and his assistant, and the two priests made seven — unless Father Gault had asked Kornhoer to sit with them.

The reader concluded the an-

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nouncements, and Jerome entered the hall.

"*Flectamus genua*," intoned the reader.

The robed legions genuflected with military precision as the abbot blessed his flock.

"*Levate*."

The legions arose. Jerome took his place at the special table and glanced back toward the entrance. Gault should be bringing the others. Previously their meals had been served in the guest house rather than the refectory, to avoid subjecting them to the austerity of the monks' own frugal fare.

When they came, he looked around for Brother Kornhoer, but the monk was not with them.

"Why the eighth place setting?" he murmured to Brother Gault when they had taken their places.

Gault looked blank and shrugged.

The scholar filled the place on the abbot's right and the others fell in toward the foot of the table, leaving the place on his left empty. He turned to beckon Kornhoer to join them, but the reader began intoning a preface before he could catch the monk's eye.

"*Oremus*," answered the abbot, and the legions bowed.

During the blessing, someone slipped quietly into the seat on the abbot's left. Father Jerome frowned but did not look up to identify the culprit during the prayer.

"*. . . et Spiritus Sancti, Amen*," finished the voice.

"*Sedete*," called the reader, and the ranks began seating themselves.

The abbot glanced sharply at the figure on his left.

"Poet!"

The bruised lily bowed extravagantly and smiled. "Good evening, Sires, learned don, distinguished hosts," he orated. "What are we having tonight? Roast fish and honeycombs in honor of the temporal resurrection that's upon us? Or have you, M'Lord Abbot, finally cooked the goose of the mayor of the village?"

"I would like to cook—"

"Ha!" quoth the poet, and turned affably toward the scholar. "Such culinary excellence one enjoys in this place, Don Thaddeo! You should join us more often. I suppose they are feeding you nothing but roast pheasant and unimaginative beef in the guest house. A shame! Here one fares better. I do hope the chef has his usual gusto tonight, his inward flame, his enchanted touch. Ah . . ." The poet rubbed his hands and smirked hungrily. "Perhaps we shall have his inspired Mock Pork with Maize à la Friar John, eh?"

"It sounds interesting," said the scholar. "What is it?"

"Greasy armadillo with parched corn, boiled in donkey milk. A regular Sunday special."

"Poet!" snapped the abbot, then to the don: "I apologize for his presence. He wasn't invited."

The scholar surveyed the poet

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with detached amusement. "M'Lord Hannegan too keeps several court fools," he told Jerome. "I'm familiar with the species. You needn't apologize for him."

The poet sprang up from his stool and bowed deeply before the don. "Allow me instead to apologize for the abbot, Sire!" he cried with feeling.

He held the bow for a moment. They waited for him to finish his foolishness. Instead, he shrugged suddenly, sat down, and speared a smoking fowl from the platter deposited before them by a postulant. He tore off a leg and bit into it with gusto. They watched him with puzzlement.

"I suppose you're right in not accepting my apology for him," he said to the don at last.

The scholar reddened slightly.

"Before I throw you out, worm," said Father Gault, "let's probe the depths of this iniquity."

The poet waggled his head and munched thoughtfully. "It's pretty deep, all right," he admitted.

Someday Gault is going to strangle himself on that foot of his, thought Jerome.

But the younger priest was visibly annoyed, and sought to draw the incident out *ad absurdum* in order to find grounds for quashing the fool. "Apologize at length for your host, Poet," he commanded. "And explain yourself as you go."

"Drop it, Father, drop it," Jerome said hastily.

The poet smiled graciously at the abbot. "That's all right, M'Lord," he said. "I don't mind apologizing for you in the least. You apologize for me, I apologize for you, and isn't that a fitting maneuver in charity and good will? Nobody need apologize for himself — which is always so humiliating. Using my system, however, everyone gets apologized for, and nobody has to do his own apologizing."

Only the officers seemed to find the poet's remarks amusing. Apparently the expectation of humor was enough to produce the illusion of humor, and the comedian could elicit laughter with gesture and expression, regardless of what he said. Don Thaddeo wore a dry smirk, but it was the kind of look a man might give a clumsy performance by a trained animal.

"And so," the poet was continuing, "if you would but allow me to serve as your humble helper, M'Lord, you would never have to eat your own crow. As your Apologetic Advocate, for example, I might be delegated by you to offer contrition to important guests for the existence of bedbugs. And to bedbugs for the abrupt change of fare."

The abbot glowered and resisted an impulse to grind the poet's bare toe with the heel of his sandal. He kicked the fellow's ankle, but the fool persisted.

"I would assume all the blame for you, of course," he said, noisily

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chewing white meat. "It's a fine system, one which I was prepared to make available to you too, Most eminent Scholar. I'm sure you would have found it convenient. I have been given to understand that systems of logic and methodology must be devised and perfected before science advances. And my system of negotiable and transferable apologetics would have been of particular value to you, Don Thaddeo."

"Would have?"

"Yes. It's a pity. Somebody stole my blue-headed goat."

"Your what?"

"Blue-headed goat. He had a head as bald as Hannegan's, Your Brilliance, and blue as the tip of Brother Armbruster's nose. I meant to make you a present of the animal, but some dastard filched him before you came."

The abbot clenched his teeth and held his heel poised over the poet's toe. Don Thaddeo was frowning slightly, but he seemed determined to untangle the poet's obscure skein of meaning.

"Do we need a blue-headed goat?" he asked his clerk.

"I can see no pressing urgency about it, Sir," said the clerk.

"But the need is obvious!" said the poet. "They say you are writing equations that will one day remake the world. They say a new light is dawning. If there's to be light, then somebody will have to be blamed for the darkness that's past."

"Ah, hence the goat." He glanced at the abbot. "A sickly jest. Is it the best he can do?"

"You'll notice he's unemployed. But let us talk of something sensib—"

"No, no no, *no!*" objected the poet. "You mistake my meaning, Your Brilliance. The goat is to be enshrined and honored, not blamed! Crown him with the crown Saint Leibowitz sent you, and thank him for the light that's rising. Then blame Leibowitz, and drive *him* into the desert. That way *you* won't have to wear the second crown. The one with thorns. Responsibility, it's called."

The poet's hostility had broken out into the open, and he was no longer trying to seem humorous. The don gazed at him icily. The abbot's heel wavered again over the poet's toe, and again had reluctant mercy on it.

"And when," said the poet, "your patron's army comes to seize this abbey, the goat can be placed in the courtyard and taught to bleat 'There's been nobody here but me, nobody here but me' whenever a stranger comes by."

One of the officer's started up from his stool with an angry grunt, his hand reaching reflexively for his saber. He broke the hilt clear of the scabbard, and six inches of steel glistened a warning at the poet. The don seized his wrist and tried to force the blade back in the sheath, but it was like tugging at the arm of a marble statue.

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"Ah! A swordsman as well as a draftsman!" taunted the poet, apparently unafraid of dying. "Your sketches of the abbey's defenses show such promise of artistic —"

The officer barked an oath and the blade leaped clean of the scabbard. His comrades seized him, however, before he could lunge. An astonished rumble came from the congregation as the startled monks came to their feet. The poet was still smiling blandly.

"— artistic growth," he continued. "I predict that one day your drawing of the underwall tunnels will be hung in a museum of fine —"

A dull *chunk!* came from under the table. The poet paused in midbite, lowered the wishbone from his mouth, and turned slowly white. He munched, swallowed, and continued to lose color. He gazed abstractly upward.

"You're grinding it off," he muttered out of the side of his mouth.

"Through talking?" the abbot asked, and continued to grind.

"I think I have a bone in my throat," the poet admitted.

"You wish to be excused?"

"I am afraid I must."

"A pity. We shall miss you." Jerome gave the toe one last grind for good measure. "You may go, then."

The poet exhaled gustily, blotted his mouth, and arose. He drained his wine cup and inverted it in the center of the tray. Something in his manner compelled them to watch him. He pulled down his eyelid with one thumb, bent his head over his cupped palm and pressed. The eyeball popped out into his palm, bringing a choking sound from the Texarkanans who were apparently unaware of the poet's artificial orb.

"Watch him carefully," said the poet to the glass eye, and then deposited it on the upturned base of his winecup where it stared balefully at Don Thaddeo. "Good evening, M'Lords," he said cheerfully to the group, and marched away.

The angry officer muttered a curse and struggled to free himself from the grasp of his comrades.

"Take him back to his quarters and sit on him till he cools off," the don told them. "And better see that he doesn't get a chance at that lunatic."

"I'm mortified," he said to the abbot, when the livid guardsman was hauled away. "They aren't my servants, and I can't give them orders. But I can promise you he will grovel for this. And if he refuses to apologize and leave immediately, he'll have to match that hasty sword against mine before noon tomorrow."

"No bloodshed!" begged the priest. "It was nothing. Let's all forget it." His hands were trembling, his countenance gray.

"He will make apology and go," the don insisted, "or I shall offer to kill him. Don't worry, he doesn't dare fight me, because if he won,

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Hannegan would have him impaled on the public stake while they forced his wife to — but never mind that. He'll grovel and go. Just the same, I'm deeply ashamed that such a thing could have come about."

"I should have had the poet thrown out as soon as he showed up. He provoked the whole thing, and I failed to stop it. The provocation was clear."

"Provocation? By the fanciful lie of a vagrant fool? Josard reacted as if the poet's charges were true."

"Then you don't know that they *are* preparing a comprehensive report on the military value of our abbey as a fortress?"

The scholar's jaw fell. He stared from one priest to the other in apparent unbelief.

"Can this be true?" he asked after a long silence.

The abbot nodded.

"And yet you've permitted us to stay."

"We keep no secrets. Your companions are welcome to make such a study, if they wish. I would not presume to ask *why* they want the information. The poet's assumption, of course, was merest fantasy."

"Of course," the don said weakly, not looking at his hosts.

"Surely your prince has no aggressive ambitions in this region, as the poet hinted."

"Surely not."

"And even if he did, I'm sure he would have the wisdom — or at least the wise counselors to lead him — to understand that our abbey's value as a storehouse of ancient wisdom is many times greater than its value as a citadel."

The don caught the note of pleading, the undercurrent of supplication for help, in the priest's voice, and he seemed to brood on it, picking lightly at his food and saying nothing for a time.

"We'll speak of this matter again before I return to the collegium," he promised quietly.

IX

There was a pall over the rest of the meal, but it began to lift during the period of group singing that followed the sweets, and it lifted entirely with the clowns and tumblers that followed the songs. When the time came for the scholar to address the assemblage, embarrassment had waned, and at least a surface cordiality had returned to the group.

Father Jerome led the guest of honor to the lectern, followed by Gault and the clerk who sat with them on the platfom. The applause was eager when the abbot introduced the don, and the hush that followed was like a court awaiting a verdict. The scholar was no orator, but the verdict was satisfying to all.

"I have been amazed at what we find here," he told them. "A few weeks ago, I would not have believed — *did not* believe — that it was possible for such a collection of books, papers, and relics to have survived from the last great civiliza-

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tion. It is still hard to believe, but thus far we have been able to find no reason to question their authenticity. That they have survived twelve centuries is incredible enough, but even more unbelievable is that they have survived unnoticed for the past half century or so, when there have been a few men in our lands capable of appreciating their potential value. . . ."

The congregation was eager to receive such a favorable reaction to the abbey's collection from one so gifted, and the abbot wondered if they even caught the slight undercurrent of resentment and perhaps suspicion in the scholar's tone. "Had I known of these sources five years ago," he was saying, "much of my work in optics would have been unnecessary." *Ahah!* thought the abbot, so that's it. Or part of it, at least. He's finding out that some of his discoveries are only rediscoveries, and it leaves a bitter taste. But surely he must know that he can never in his life time be more than a recoverer of lost works. However brilliant, he can only do what others had done before him. And so it must be until the world becomes, if it ever does, as learned as it was once.

For all of that, however, it was easy to see that the scholar was impressed and eager to seize the opportunity to glean all possible information from the fragments of scientific writings at the abbey.

"My time here is limited," said the don. "And from what I have seen, it would take twenty specialists several decades to understand these documents. Physical science ordinarily advances by inductive reasoning tested by experiment, but here the task is deductive. From a few broken bits of general principles, we must attempt to understand particulars. In some cases, it may be impossible. For example . . ." He paused a moment to produce a packet of notes and thumbed through them briefly. "Here is a quotation taken from a four page fragment of a book which may have been an advanced physics test:

" '. . . *and if the space terms predominate in the expression for the interval between event-points, the interval is said to be* "space-like," *since it is then possible to select a coordinate system — belonging to an observer with an admissable velocity — in which the events are simultaneous, and therefore separated only spatially. If, however, the interval is* time-like, *with time terms predominating, the events cannot be simultaneous in any coordinate system, but there exists a coordinate system in which the space terms will vanish entirely, so that the separation between the events will be purely temporal,* id est, *occurring at the same place but at different times. Now upon examining the extremals of the real interval* . . .' "

He looked up with a whimsical smile. "There follows a page and a half of mathematics which treats some of our fundamental concepts

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as if they weren't basic at all, but evanescent appearances that depend on a point of view. It ends with the word '*Therefore*,' but the rest of the page is burned, and the conclusion with it. The reasoning is impeccable, the mathematics quite elegant, but the assumptions on which they rest seem those of a madman. Is it a hoax? If it isn't, what is its place in the whole scheme of the science of the ancients? What precedes it and follows it? What is prerequisite to understanding it? How can it be tested, and what can be predicted by it? Questions we can't answer. And this is just one example of the many enigmas posed by these papers you've kept so long. Reasoning which touches experiential reality *nowhere* is the business of angelologists and theologians, not of physical scientists. And yet such papers as these describe systems which touch *our* experience nowhere. Were they within the experiential reach of the ancients? Certain references would indicate it. One paper refers to elemental transmutation — which we believe impossible — and then says '*experiment proves*.' But *how?*

"It may take generations to evaluate and understand these things. It is unfortunate that they must remain here in this inaccessible place, for it will take a concentrated effort by numerous scholars to make meaning of them. I am sure you must realize that your present facilities are inadequate . . ."

Seated on the platform behind the speaker, the abbot began to glower, and started waiting for the worst. Don Thaddeo chose, however, to offer no proposals. But his remarks continued to make clear his feeling that such relics belonged in more competent hands than those of the monks of the Albertian Order of Saint Leibowitz, and that the situation as it prevailed was absurd. Perhaps sensing the growing uneasiness in the room, he soon turned to the subject of his immediate studies, which involved a more thorough investigation into the nature of light than had been made previously. Several of the abbey's relics were proving to be of much help, and he hoped to devise soon an experimental means for testing his theories. After some discussion of the phenomenon of refraction, he paused, then said apologetically: "I hope none of this offends anybody's religious beliefs," and looked around quizzically. Seeing that their faces remained curious and bland, he continued for a time, then invited questions from the congregation.

"Do you mind a question from the platform?" asked the abbot.

"Not at all," said the scholar, looking a bit doubtful, as if thinking *et tu Brute*.

"I was wondering what there is about the refrangible property of light that you thought might be offensive to religion?"

"Well . . ." The don paused uncomfortably. "Monsignor Apollo, whom you know, grew quite heated

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on the subject. He said that light could not possibly have been refrangible before the Flood, because the rainbow was supposedly —"

The room burst into roaring laughter, drowning the rest of the remark. By the time the abbot had waved them to silence, Don Thaddeo was beet-red, and Father Jerome had some difficulty in maintaining his own solemn visage.

"Monsignor Apollo is a good man, a good priest, but all men are apt to be incredible asses at times, especially outside their domains. I'm sorry I asked the question."

"The answer relieves me," said the scholar. "I seek no quarrels."

There were no further questions, and the don proceeded to his second topic: the growth and the present activities of his collegium. The picture as he painted it seemed encouraging. The collegium was flooded with applicants who wanted to study at the institute. The collegium was assuming an educational function as well as an investigative one. Interest in natural philosophy and science was on the increase among the literate laity. The institute was being liberally endowed. Symptoms of revival and rennaissance.

"I might mention a few of the current researches and investigations being conducted by our people," he went on. "Following Bret's work on the behaviour of gases, Don Viche Mortoin is investigating the possibilities for the artificial production of ice. Don Friider Halb is seeking a practical means for transmitting messages by electrical variations along a wire. . . ." The list was long, and the monks appeared impressed. Studies in many fields — medicine, astronomy, geology, mathmatics, mechanics — were being undertaken. A few seemed impractical and ill-considered, but most seemed to promise rich rewards in knowledge and practical application. From Jejene's search for the Universal Nostrum to Bodalk's reckless assault on orthodox geometries, the collegium's activities exhibited a healthy hankering to jimmy open Nature's private files, locked since mankind had burned its institutional memories and condemned itself to cultural amnesia more than a millennium ago.

"In addition to these studied, Don Maho Mahh is heading a project which seeks further information about the origin of the human species. Since this is primarily an archeological task, he asked me to search your library for any suggestive material on the subject, after I complete my own study here. However, perhaps I'd better not dwell on this at any length, since it's tending to cause controversy with the theologians. But if there are any questions . . ."

A young monk who was studying for the priesthood stood up and was recognized by the don.

"Sir, I was wondering if you were acquainted with the suggestions of Saint Augustine on the subject?"

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"I am not."

"A Fourth Century bishop and philosopher. He suggested that in the beginning, God created all things in their germinal causes, including the physiology of man, and that the germinal causes inseminate, as it were, the formless matter — which then gradually *evolved* into the more complex shapes, and eventually Man. Has this hypothesis been considered?"

The don's smile was condescending, although he did not or brand the proposal childish afraid it has not, but I shall [illegible] up," he said, in a tone that indicate he would not.

"Thank you," said the monk, and sat down meekly.

"Perhaps the most daring research of all, however," continued the sage, "is being conducted by my friend Don Esser Shon. It is an attempt to synthesize living matter. Don Esser hopes to create living protoplasm, using only six basic ingredients. This work could lead to — yes? You have a question?"

A monk at the third table had risen and was bowing toward the speaker. The abbot leaned forward to peer at him and recognized, with horror, that it was Brother Armbruster, the librarian.

"If you would do an old man the kindness," croaked the monk, dragging out his words in a plodding monotone. "This Don Esser Shon — who limits himself to only six basic ingredients — is very interesting. I was wondering — are they permitting him to use both hands?"

"Why, I . . . ." The don paused and frowned.

"And may I also inquire," Armbruster's dry voice dragged on, "whether this remarkable feat is to be performed from the sitting, standing, or prone position? Or perhaps on horseback while playing two trombones?"

The novices snickered audibly. The abbot came quickly to his feet.

"Brother Armbruster, you will discuss your question with me in my study. In fact, immediately after we re finished here. You may wait, meanwhile, in the chapel. Good evening."

The librarian bowed again and stole quietly out of the refectory, his carriage humble but his eyes burning triumphantly. Jerome murmured apologetically to the scholar, but the don's glance was suddenly chilly.

"In conclusion," he said, "a brief outline of what the world can expect, in my opinion, from the intellectual revolution that's just beginning." Eyes burning, he looked around at them, and his voice changed from casual to fervent rhythms. "Ignorance has been our king. Since the death of empire, he sits unchallenged on the throne of man. His dynasty is age-old. His right to rule is now considered legitimate. Past sages have affirmed it. They did nothing to unseat him.

"Tomorrow, a new prince shall

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rule. Men of understanding, men of science shall stand behind his throne, and the universe will come to know his might. His name is Truth. His empire shall encompass the Earth. And the mastery of Man over the Earth shall be renewed. A century from now, men will fly through the air in mechanical birds. Metal carriages will race along roads of man-made stone. There will be buildings of thirty stories, ships that go under the sea, machines to perform all works.

"And how will this come to pass?" He paused and lowered his voice. "In the same way all change comes to pass in the world, I fear. And I am sorry it is so. It will come to pass by blood and iron and vengeance, by violence and upheaval, by flame and fury, for no change comes calmly over the world."

He glanced up and around, for a soft murmur arose from the congregation.

"It will *be* so. We do not *will* it so."

"But why . . . ?"

"Ignorance is king. Many would not profit by his abdication. Many enrich themselves by means of his dark monarchy. They are his court, and in his name they defraud and govern, enrich themselves and perpetuate their power. Even literary they fear, for the written word is another channel of communication that they unite their enemies among themselves. Their weapons are keen-honed, and they use them with skill. They will press the battle upon the world when their interests are threatened, and violence which follows will last until the structure of society is leveled to rubble, and a new society emerges. I am sorry, but that is how I see it."

The words brought a pall over the room. Jerome's hopes shrank a little, for the prophesy gave shape to the scholar's probable outlook. He knew the military ambitions of his monarch. He must approve them, disapprove them, or accept them as inevitable impersonal phenomena along with flood, famine, and whirlwind. So, apparently, he accepted them as inevitable, to avoid having to make the moral judgment. Let there be blood, iron, and weeping. . . .

How could such a man escape his own conscience and disavow his responsibility so easily! the abbot stormed to himself.

But then the words came back to him. *For in those days, the Lord God had suffered the wise men to know the means by which the world itself might be destroyed. . . .*

He also suffered them to know how it might be saved, and, as always, let them choose it themselves. And perhaps they chose as Don Thaddeo chooses. To wash their hands before the multitude. Look you to it. Lest they themselves be crucified.

And they had been crucified anyhow. Without dignity. Always for anybody anyhow is to get nailed on

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it and hang on it and if you drop off they beat . . .

There was an interruption. The scholar had stopped talking.

The abbot blinked around the hall. Half the congregation was staring toward the entrance of the refectory. At first his eyes could make out nothing.

"What is it?" he whispered to Father Gault.

"An old man with a beard and a shawl," hissed Gault. "It looks like . . . no, he wouldn't . . ."

Father Jerome arose and moved to the front of the dais to stare at the faintly defined shape in the shadows. Then he called out to it softly.

"Benjamin?"

The figure stirred. It drew its shawl tighter about spindly shoulders and hobbled slowly into the candlelight. It stopped again, muttering to itself as it looked around the room; then its eyes found the scholar on the lectern.

Leaning on a crooked staff, the old apparition hobbled slowly and deliberately among the tables, approaching the lectern, never taking its eyes from the man who stood behind it. Don Thaddeo looked humorously perplexed at first, but when no one stirred or spoke, he seemed to lose color as the decrepit vision came near him. The face of the bearded antiquity blazed with the hopeful ferocity of some compelling passion that burned more furiously in him than the life-principle long since due to depart.

He came close to the lectern, paused. His eyes twitched over the startled speaker. His mouth quivered. He smiled. He reached out one trembling hand toward the scholar. The don drew back with a snort of revulsion.

The hermit was agile. He vaulted the barrier, dodged the lectern, and seized the scholar's arm.

"What madness —"

Benjamin kneaded the arm while he stared hopefully into the scholar's eyes.

His face clouded. The glow died. He dropped the arm. A great keening sigh came from the dry old lungs as hope vanished. The eternally knowing smirk of the Old Jew of the Mountain returned to his face. He turned to the congregation, spread his hands, shrugged eloquently.

"It's still not Him," he told them sourly, then hobbled away.

Afterwards, there was little formality.

X

It was during the fifth week of Don Thaddeo's visit that the messenger brought the black news. The Prince of the ruling dynasty of Laredo had demanded that Texarkanan troops be evacuated forthwith from his realm. The prince died of poison that night, and a state of war was proclaimed between the states of Laredo and Texarkana. The war would be short-lived, for Laredan armies were committed to the Plains.

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It could be assumed, in fact, that the war had ended the day after it began, and Hannegan now controlled all lands and peoples from the Red River to the Rio Grande.

This had been expected. But not the accompanying news.

Monsignor Marcus Apollo. Papal Nuncio to the court of Hannegan II, by Grace of God Mayor, Viceroy of Texarkana, Defender of the Faith, and Vaquero Supreme of the Plains, had been hanged by his neck — softly so as not to break vertebrae — and meanwhile drawn and quartered by an officer of the Mayor, Viceroy, Defender, Vaquero, etc., who had found the priest to be guilty of spying for international powers attempting to undermine the state.

The messenger need hardly have added that the State of Texarkana was under interdict by papal decree, and that no priest might absolve a penitent who refused to condemn the act.

On the Plains, the Laredan forces would now have to fight their way back home through the nomad tribes, only to lay down their arms at their own borders, for their nation and their kin were hostage.

"A regrettable incident," said Don Thaddeo, referring to the execution of the nuncio. "Because of my national status, I must offer to leave."

"Nonsense. Whatever your national status, your human status makes you welcome," the abbot told him.

But a rift had appeared. The scholar kept largely to himself afterwards, seldom conversing with the monks. His relationship with Brother Kornhoer cooled noticeably, although the inventor spent an hour or two each day in servicing and inspecting the dynamo and the lamp, and keeping himself informed of the progress of the don's work, which was proceeding with apparent haste since the uneasiness had begun.

Disturbing rumors were coming from the Plains, and people of means in the Village of Sanly Bowitts were finding it an appropriate time to visit relatives in other countries. Even the beggars and vagrants were getting out of town. The merchants and petite bourgeoisie, as always, found themselves chained down by assets which were not fluid and could not be abandoned without ruin. A committee of citizens headed by Mayor Macklehark visited the abbey to request sanctuary for the townspeople in the event of invasion. "We will take in anyone who will surrender his arms at the gates," the abbot assured them, "but we are not going to be used as a fortress for the defense of a regime. No organized military forces." Since at the moment the committee was interested only in saving their skins, there was no argument. Later, there would be officials from Denver, less interested in saving lives than in saving a political realm, but he meant to give them a similar answer: "No troops will be quartered

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here." For the abbey had been built as a fortress of faith and knowledge, and so he intended to keep it, Providence willing.

The desert crawled with wanderers out of the east. Traders, trappers, and herdsmen, in moving west, brought news of the Plains. The cattle plague was sweeping like wildfire among the herds of the nomads, and famine seemed imminent. Laredo's forces had suffered a mutinous cleavage since the fall of the dynasty. Part of them were returning to their homeland, while the rest set out grimly to march on Texarkana. Weakened by the split, their ranks were being wiped out by Mad Bear's warriors who thirsted for vengeance against those who had brought the plague. It was rumored that Hannegan had generously offered to make the tribes his protected dependents, provided they would swear fealty to "civilized" law and accept his officers into their councils. "Submit or starve" was the choice offered them by the situation, and undoubtedly many would choose to starve rather than give allegiance to an agrarian-commercial state.

It was during the brief visit of a party of herdsmen that the poet vanished from the abbey. It was the scholar who first noticed his absence from the guest house, and he stopped in the abbot's study, to inquire about the fellow.

Jerome's face wrinkled in surprise. "Are you certain he's moved out?" he asked. "The poet often spends a few days in the village, or goes over to the mesa to visit Benjamin."

"His belongings are missing," said the don. "Everything is gone from his cell."

The abbot made a wry mouth. "Then I would advise an immediate inventory of all your possessions."

The don looked thoughtful. "So that's where my boots . . ."

"No doubt."

"I set them out to be polished. They weren't returned. That was the day he tried to batter down my door."

"He *what?*" gasped Jerome. "Who? The poet?"

The scholar chuckled. "I'm afraid I've been having a little sport with him. You remember the night he left his glass eye on the table?"

"Yes."

"I picked it up." He paused, then opened his pouch, took out the poet's eyeball, and laid it on the abbot's desk. "Later, I let him find out I had it, then I denied it. We've been having sport with him about it ever since, even to creating rumors that it was really the long-lost eyeball of the Baring idol, and ought to be returned to the museum. He became quite frantic after a time. Of course, I meant to return it before we go home. Do you suppose he'll be back?"

"I doubt it," said the abbot with a shudder, staring at the orb as if it were a curse. "But I'll keep it for him, if you wish. Although he's just as likely to turn up in Texarkana

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looking for it there. He regards it as a potent talisman."

"How so?"

"He claims to see much better when he's wearing it."

"But it's only glass."

"Even so, he swears that with it he can perceive true meanings. Although it gives him blinding headaches. But, then, one never knows when he intends a double meaning."

The scholar smiled quizzically. "Once he yelled through the door that I needed it more than he did. So maybe he really regards it as a potent fetish."

"That's not necessarily what he meant."

"No? How so?"

"If he was being insulting . . . but no, I had better not endeavor to explain the poet's insults. It might make me seem a party to them."

"Not at all. I'm curious."

The abbot glanced at the image of Saint Leibowitz in the corner of the room. "The functions the poet claimed for the eye were the functions of insight and conscience."

"Oh. He was saying I lacked them?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"If insight and conscience were a glass eye, they could be conveniently removed and replaced at will. The poet said it was convenient. He said it as a joke. But he behaved as if he believed it. He was saying you needed a removable conscience more than he did."

The scholar looked at the prolate sphere on the table and rolled it around with his finger. Suddenly he laughed. "Perhaps I'll keep it after all," he said, picking it up. He tossed it and caught it, glanced doubtfully at Father Jerome.

The priest shrugged. "If he has stolen your boots."

Don Thaddeo dropped the eye back in his pouch. "He can have it if he comes to claim it. By the way, I meant to tell you: my work here is nearly finished. We'll be leaving in a very few days."

"Won't the trip back be rather dangerous just now?" asked the priest. "We hear of trouble on the Plains."

Don Thaddeo frowned at the wall. "We are to camp at a certain spot a week's ride to the east of here," he mumbled. "A group of . . . uh . . . an escort will meet us there."

"I hope," said the priest, relishing the bit of polite savagery, "that the escort's allegiances haven't switched sides since you made the arrangements. It's apparently becoming rather hard to distinguish foes from allies these days."

The don reddened and looked around. "Especially Texarkana. Is that what you mean? Let's be frank with each other, Father. I support the prince who makes possible my work, no matter what I think of his policies, or his politics. For the sake of the work, I support him. If he extends his empire, the collegium will profit. If the collegium profits, man-

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kind profits from knowledge gained.

"The ones that survive, you mean."

"Granted. But that is always true in any case."

"Twelve centuries ago, even the survivors didn't profit. Do we have to start down that road again?"

The scholar shrugged. "What can I do about it?" he asked crossly. "Hannegan is prince, not I."

"Ah, but your work promises to help restore, eventually, Man's control over the forces of Nature. You are creating the power to control. But into whose hands are you placing the power? And who will use it to what end? But more important — how will he be kept in check? These are decisions that can still be made, and it's not too late to make them, if anybody is of a mind to decide. But if they aren't made, then soon it will be too late — as soon as kings and princes and powers find out that your science can enrich them and strengthen their positions. Mankind will profit from the knowledge, as you say, but who is going to be mankind's representative? The national state? A prince who signs his letters 'X'?"

The priest had not expected to convince him, but he noticed with sagging heart that Don Thaddeo's face wore the plodding patience of a man listening to an argument settled within himself.

"What you are really suggesting," said the scholar, "is that we wait a little while. That we learn Nature's secrets the slow way and tell nobody. That we save them up for the day when Man is good and pure and holy and wise."

"That is not what I meant —"

"It is not what you meant to *say*, but it is what you say would really mean. Keep knowledge cloistered, and don't try to apply it until men are holy. That's what you've been doing here in this abbey for generations."

"We have withheld nothing."

"You haven't withheld it, but you sat on it so quietly, nobody knew it was there, and you did nothing with it."

Brief anger flared in the old man's eyes. "There is our founder," he said, pointing at the statue in the corner. "He was a scientist like yourself, before the world went mad and he was driven to seek sanctuary. It's time you two met, perhaps. He founded this order to save what could be saved of the records of the last culture. Saved from what? Look where he's standing. See that pile of kindling? The books? That's how much the world wanted learning then, and for several centuries afterwards. He died for it. When they drenched him with gasoline, legend says he asked them to give him a cup of it. They thought he mistook it for water, so they did. He blessed it, and said the Consecration — *Hic est enim Calix Sanguinis Mei* — and he drank it before they hung him and set fire to him. Shall I read you a list of our martyrs? Shall I name all the bat-

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tles fought to keep these records intact? The monks blinded in the copy room? Yet you say we have withheld learning!"

"Not intentionally, but only in effect, and only for the very motives you suggest should be mine," said the scholar, a little startled by the abbot's outburst. "If you try to save wisdom until the world is wise, Father, the world will never have it."

"I see the misunderstanding is basic," snapped the priest. "The question is one of choosing employers. The men who will later control the power and the wealth that emerges from discovery and invention."

"I have little choice. Would you have me work for the Church?" And the scorn in his voice was unmistakable.

It was a little before noon on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. In the chapel, the abbot was saying Mass privately at the Mary altar, while in the basement the don and his party were sorting out their notes and records preparatory to departure. The arc lamp still glared and sputtered overhead, filling the old library with blue-white harshness, while the team of novices pumped wearily at the hand-powered dynamo. The light was flickering occasionally, for the monk atop the ladder who kept the arc gap adjusted was inexperienced at his task. The monk who had previously performed that service was now in the infirmary with wet dressings over his eyes.

The scholar seemed in a cheerful mood, and a small group of monastics gathered in the vaults to bid goodby to the guests. The don answered questions about his studies, and displayed sketches of proposed instruments and apparatus which he hoped to construct for the experimental testing of several half-formed hypotheses suggested by his study of the ancient records. The hypotheses were his own, but some of the test apparatus had been suggested by Kornhoer, who had a seeming genius for dreaming practical contrivances that could be constructed with bailing wire and a file.

"The world lost a fine inventor in you," he told Kornhoer, acknowledging his indebtedness for a sketch of a rig with which he hoped to study the effects of a magnetic field on polarized light. "I wish you would join us at the collegium. We could work well together. A physical hypothesis is nothing but a mathematical hunch until it can be tested by observation. And you've got a remarkable gift for grasping things in terms of screws and wires and lenses, while I'm still dealing in abstractions."

"But the abstractions would never occur to me," said Kornhoer, who had permitted himself to unbend slightly in the don's presence on this last day, although the formality of their relationship had been growing.

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"I wish you could be there to help set this up," said Don Thaddeo, returning the drawing to the pile. "Your talents ought to be put to better use."

The monk glanced toward the dynamo and seemed to squirm inwardly. "If I have been of some help to you, I am glad," he said slowly. "But I was called to serve here. Constructing devices is play. Perhaps for some it is work. But my work is to serve Christ. I would not do it for . . . " He paused.

"Hannegan?" The don laughed. "Bah, they've been after you." He turned away without explaining whom he meant by "*they*."

"What about Don Maho's project, sir?" someone asked. "You said something to us in the refectory about planning to search for material here that might aid his work. Did you manage to find anything pertinent? About the origin of the human species?"

"As a matter of fact, yes!" The don's eyes lit up with that brash exuberance of one expert invading the field of another expert for the purpose of straightening it all out. "In fact we've located a number of references that may prove fertile, and I think they should be of some help to him." He paused. "But perhaps we'd better not go into it. It's a touchy subject with some people. And you have Genesis."

"Genesis is figurative," said Father Gault, who had joined the group late. "Saint Augustine's evolutionary concepts don't conform to the precise words of Genesis either, but they're regarded very highly in most circles."

"Very well, then. One fragmentary text we discovered is either suggestive of something completely revolutionary, or it doesn't mean anything. It is an account of humanity being created by a preceding race."

"No," said Gault flatly, and began shaking his head.

"Wait! That's not the most fascinating part of it. According to this, Man was created only *shortly before* the fall of the last civilization!"

"Then how do you account for the last civilization?"

"It wasn't Man's. It belonged to the preceding race . . ."

The abbot had come quietly down the stairs. He stopped in the entrance and listened incredulously.

". . . of intelligent creatures," the scholar continued exuberantly. "All this is speculation, of course."

"But all of our history —" Gault objected.

"Wait! Before the collapse of the civilization, their history is ours, for we took it over, and even took their names and language. They created men to do their work, but men soon came to outnumber them, and finally rebelled against them, overthrew them, slaughtered them. It would explain a lot of things about the fall of the last civilization, and why everyone relapsed into barbar —"

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"God have mercy on this house!" roared the abbot from the doorway. "Spare us, for we knew not what we did!"

"I told you," muttered the scholar to the universe in general.

The old priest advanced on the don like a nemesis. "Show me this document, Sir Philosopher," he commanded in a tone that the others recognized as one reserved for errant novices and mischievous students. That he would use it on the learned don caused several jaws to drop.

The scholar was pawing hastily through his notes in his search for the source, but the light kept flickering as the gaping monks at the turnstile strained to listen. The room had already been in a state of shock after Don Thaddeo's utterances, and the entrance of the abbot had only served to bring it into focus.

"Here it is," the don announced and handed it over hastily.

Jerome gave him a brief glare and retired to a corner to read. There was a brief but awkward silence.

"Well, I had better commence packing," muttered the scholar, and began shuffling his papers again. The others shifted about restlessly, obviously desirous of slinking away but not daring to brave the wrath of their ruler.

Jerome took only a few minutes to satisfy himself. He stalked back abruptly and handed the papers to Father Gault.

"*Lege!*" he grunted.

"But what . . ."

"It seems to be a fragment of play or dialogue about some people creating artificial people for workers, and the workers arising against their creators. It's only a few pages from the original, but it could easily be an imaginative work."

"But that's —"

"*Lege!*"

The younger priest retired to read. The abbot turned on the scholar, keeping himself in an iron control.

"To the image of God He created them: male and female He created them," announced the old man in an informative tone.

"But the freedom to speculate is —"

"And He blessed them, saying: increase and multiply, fill the Earth and subdue it."

"— essential to the advancement of scientific —"

"And the Lord God took man, and put him into the paradise of pleasure, to dress it, and to keep it."

"— knowledge, and if we are to be hampered by adherence to —"

"And He commanded him, saying: Of every tree of paradise thou shalt eat: But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat."

"— superstitious dogma, we shall never make the world one bit better than it has been for —"

"For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death."

"— the last twelve centuries."

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"It never was any better. It never will be. It will only be richer or poorer, more cunning or less cunning."

"But the freedom to speculate — I only meant —" He threw up his hands in dismay and began sorting his papers again. "I knew it would offend you, but you said it wouldn't."

"Your freedom to speculate is undisputed, and no one is offended. But the unbridled use of the intellect for purposes of pride and vanity and personal power and advantage is the fruit of that same tree."

"You accuse me of personal motives?" asked the don, darkening.

"I accuse you of nothing. But tell me why you find it so necessary to discredit the past, even to dehumanizing the last civilization. Could it be that you wish to create, rather than merely discover, and cannot bear it otherwise?"

The scholar hissed an oath. "These books must be placed in the hands of people who know what to do with them," he said angrily. "This situation is a mockery!"

The light sputtered and went out. The monks at the treadmill had simply stopped pumping.

"Bring candles," called the abbot.

Candles were brought.

"Come down," the abbot called to the monk atop the ladder. "And bring that thing with you. Brother Kornhoer — where are you?"

The inventor was not in evidence at the moment.

"I think he stepped into the next room a moment ago."

"*Kornhoer!*"

The monk slipped into the room. He was carrying a heavy crucifix, the same one which had been displaced to free a place for hanging the arc lamp. He handed it to the abbot.

"You wanted this, Father?"

"How did you know?"

"I only decided it was time . . ." He shrugged.

The old man climbed the ladder and replaced the rood on its iron staple at the top of the archway. The *corpus* glittered gold by candlelight. The abbot turned and called down to his monks.

"Who reads in this stall henceforth, let him read by *Lumen Christi!*" he commanded.

When he came down from the ladder, the scholar was cramming the last of his papers into a large folder for later sorting. He glanced warily at the priest as if wanting nothing so much as an end of the incident, but Jerome came straight toward him.

"Let it rest," said the abbot. "There can't be any quarrel about truth — only about how men use it, and to what ends. May I ask you to clarify your last remark about our books, and the hands they're now in?"

The scholar lowered his gaze. "It was said in the heat of the moment, and I must retract it."

"But you meant it before you said it, you meant it when you said it,

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and you mean it now. It has been easy to see that you meant it all along."

The don did not deny it.

"Very well," said Jerome. "Then there is no point in my repeating a plea for you to intercede with your prince on our behalf when your officers tell him what a fine tactical military outpost this abbey would make. But you might warn him for his own sake that our predecessors have not hesitated to resist with the sword when our altars are threatened." He paused. "Will you be leaving today or tomorrow?"

"Today, I think," mumbled Don Thaddeo.

"I'll see that provisions are made ready." He turned to go, then paused to look back, adding gently: "And carry word to the collegium — that anyone who wishes to come here to study will be welcome, in spite of the poor lighting. Don Maho, especially. Or Don Esser Shon, with his six ingredients. Men must fumble with error in order to get it separated from truth — but only as long as they don't seize it hungrily." He nodded a dismissal at the monks and trudged up the stairs to be alone in his study, for the fury was twisting at his insides again, and he knew that the torture was coming.

Maybe this time it will twist clean loose, he thought almost hopefully. *Nunc dimittis, Domine, sorvum tuum. . . . Quia viderunt oculi mei salutare . . .*

He thought of sending for Father Gault to hear his confession, but it would have to wait until he was free of the guests.

Shortly a knock at the door interrupted the gathering agony.

"Can you come back later?" he grunted.

"I'm afraid I won't be here later," came the muffled voice of the abbey's distinguished guest.

"Come in, then." Jerome straightened himself and took a firm grip on pain, not attempting to dismiss it, but only to control it like an unruly servant.

The don entered and placed a folder of papers on the abbot's desk. "I thought it only decent to leave you these," he said.

"What have we here?"

"The plans of your fortifications. The ones drawn by the officers who are with me. I suggest you burn them immediately."

"Why have you done this?" the abbot breathed. "After our words in the library —"

"Don't misunderstand," the don interrupted. "I would have returned them in any case. It is a matter of honor. I could not let them take advantage of your hospitality to — but never mind. I had to wait until now to avail myself of them, because if I had taken them sooner . . ." He shrugged. "They would have had plenty of time and opportunity to complete another set."

The abbot arose slowly and reached for the scholar's hand.

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The don hesitated. "I will make no effort on your behalf . . ."

"I know."

". . . because I think what you have here should be for the world."

"It is, it was, it always has been."

They shook hands gingerly, but the abbot knew it was only a truce. Perhaps it would never be more.

But why must it all happen again?

He knew the answer to that one; for there was still the serpent whispering: For God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as gods. But it was a lie. Intellect, no, not even omniscience, was sufficient for godhood. For *that*, there must be illimitable compassion as well.

Jerome summoned the younger priest. It was very nearly time to go. And soon it would be a new year.

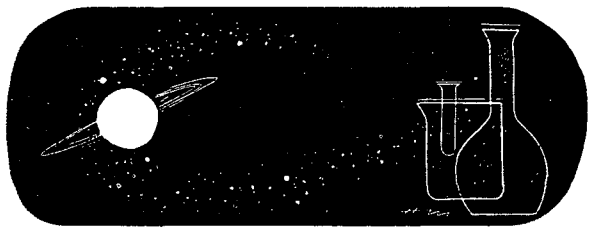
That was the year of the unprecedented torrent of rain on the desert, causing seed long dry to burst into bloom.

That was the year that a vestige of civilization came to the nomads of the Plains, and even the people of Laredo began to murmur that it was possibly all for the best.

In that year a temporary agreement was formalized and broken between the states of Denver and Texarkana. It was the year that the Old Jew returned to his former vocation of Physician and Wanderer, the year that the monks of the Albertian Order of Leibowitz buried an abbot and bowed to a new one.

There were bright hopes for tomorrow.

It was the year a king came riding out of the east, to subdue the land and own it. It was a year of Man.



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INTERIM REPORT ON BRIDEY MURPHY

As of this writing, Morey Bernstein's THE SEARCH FOR BRIDEY MURPHY *is in its 14th week on the N. Y.* Times *bestseller list, and its 8th week in first place — and I don't think there's much doubt that it will still be in first when you read this 6 weeks later. Four weeks after publication, 120,000 copies were in print: the number must by now be at least around the quarter million mark — a fantastic amount for hardcover publication.*

Nor is this phenomenon ("The hottest thing since Norman Vincent Peale," said a Texas bookdealer, not inappropriately) confined to the book business. There has been a full quota of satellite manifestations: A teen-age suicide motivated by the book; a publicity stunt by Liberace; popular recordings called Do You Believe in Reincarnation?, The Love of Bridey Murphy *and* The Bridey Murphy Rock and Roll; *countless rival claimants to memories or previous incarnations; "Come as You Were" costume parties; booming sales of everything reincarnational (except the novels of H. Rider Haggard — how soon will this craze have its first beneficial effect by reviving the wonderful adventures of Allan Quartermain and She-who-must-be-obeyed?); and above all a spreading acceptance of a shapeless sort of belief in reincarnation, comfortably free of the sense of personal responsibility implicit in the oriental doctrine of karma.*

Most surprising of all converts to B.M. is Robert A. Heinlein, who states, in a brief sketch of the future (Amazing, *April, 1956), that the knowledge of survival after death, "proved with scientific rigor" by the year 2001, is based on the fact that "Morey Bernstein, using hypnotic regression, established the personal survival of Bridget Murphy." Mr. Heinlein seems to me to have been in better prophetic vein 15 years ago, when he outlined his celebrated Future History* (Astounding, *May, 1941). There he describes our present era as "The 'Crazy Years' ": "Considerable technical advance during this period, accompanied by a gradual deterioration of mores, orientation, and social institutions, terminating in mass psychoses in the sixth decade." The publication of* BRIDEY *marked the exact midpoint of that sixth decade — which had opened with the publication of the first "saucer" books.*

For the plain fact is that Mr. Bernstein's enterprise is conclusive proof that you can *build bricks without straw. (They are known as gold bricks.) The book was "rushed" into print without any serious checking of its pur-*

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ported evidence: "To do a real job," says Doubleday editor LeBaron R. Barker, "would have required months and a great deal of money." (The book appeared 27 months after the last recorded interview with "Bridey.") Since its publication, psychologists, psychiatrists, journalists (notably Denver Post *reporter William J. Barker, who originally broke the story) and other analysts have so thoroughly taken apart its pretended evidence that it is clear that Mr. Bernstein "established" precisely nothing.*

[*Bibliographical note: For some details, see John K. Hutchens'* Roundup to Date on Bridey Murphy (N. Y. Herald Tribune Book Review, *March 11), the staff-written* Found: Bridey Murphy (Time, *March 19) and Herbert Brean's* Bridey Murphy Puts Nation in a Hypnotizzy (Life, *March 19).*]

But errors in fact, no matter how vital, can always be dismissed as unimportant by ardent believers; and it seems worthwhile to look at an even more fundamental flaw. Virginia Tighe — "Ruth Simmons" — "Bridey Murphy" can be proved guilty of culpable ignorance on matters of Irish fact; how is she on the Irish spirit — on the key matter of being *Irish? For an answer, I have consulted the most Irish Irishman I know.*

W. B. Ready, purchase librarian of Leland Stanford University, is known to F&SF readers for such richly revealing stories of Irishmen ancient and modern as The Hound of Cullen (*F&SF, November, 1953) and* Devlin (*F&SF, April, 1953; reprinted in* THE BEST FROM F&SF: THIRD SERIES)*. At my request, he read the book; he listened to the records; and now he offers you*

Bridey Murphy: An Irishman's View

by **W. B. READY**

BRIDEY MURPHY IS A NAME AS generic as Tommy Atkins, G.I. Joe, John Bull, and Uncle Sam. Were the ghost of one of these great ones to speak what would one not hear? There would be the tramp of the Chartists upon Parliament and the frightened cajole of Feargus O'Con-

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nor, breaking it up. The lovely sound of a Yankee clipper with her white sails crowding, upon her urgent business with the East. The moan of the waters that hid the ridge at Tarawa, the shouts of defiance at Bastogne, the accusations of the riddled dead around Bapaume — these one could expect to hear, from the ghosts of John Bull, Uncle Sam, G.I. Joe and Tommy Atkins. Greater than all this, more glorious would be the chronicle of Bridey Murphy, of Mother Ireland — for such is she under that name, as under the calls of Cathleen, the Shan Van Vocht, and Juno, the Paycock's wife. The woes of Ireland would surely speak from her, and the grandeur too.

Instead, as a result of many a hooked question, from the subject under hypnosis at Pueblo, Colorado, calling herself Bridey Murphy, comes news of an Ireland that never was, save in the minds of the uninformed and the vulgar.

It is strange here, to realise how homogeneous society can be in the Old Country, especially in Cork, where but for the British Garrison and the Ascendancy Class there have come no other folk to stay, let alone to mingle, for many centuries. The Irish have been alone all that time. *Sinn Fein amhain!* is an Irish rebel yell, meaning Ourselves Alone! Aye! It is more than that slogan: it is a sad statement of truth. In a grade school in Cork, a century ago as today, there would be half the children in any grade bearing one of about three or four surnames: Murphy, McCarthy, Sullivan or Donovan. The most common name of all was likely to be Murphy, and among the girls the most common Christian name was Brigid.

Brigid, as the spelling goes, was nearly a contemporary of Saint Patrick. A prince's daughter by a bondswoman, she was a beauty who foreswore her suitors to become a great ecclesiastic and a saint of Ireland. The legends and miracles attributed to her are out of this world. She is the Mary of the Gael: there are shrines by the hundred dedicated to her name all over Ireland, and the places Kilbride, Brideswell, Tubberbride, Templebride and many others are all named after her, as were most of the girls of Ireland through the centuries. It is only recently that the new saints — Bernadette, Teresa — have become more popular as Christian names, perhaps, with Mary, supplanting Brigid. But this was not the case when Bridey Murphy was supposed to be walking on earth. Incidentally, if she was moving around here below, it was in a strange and weaving way, for to go from Cork to Belfast via Cavan is about as straightforward as Chesterton's route to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head. It was really an untrodden way that she chose to go, with barely any tracks on it at all.

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The first reaction to the book and to the record is of the downright dullness and tastelessness that emanate from them like an effluvium. There is also an air of do-good earnestness about the whole thing that is reminiscent of the Epworth League. The record interpolations by Richard Janever have to be heard to be believed; they manage to vulgarise an already embarrassing situation, like a TV pitchman dressed in the coat of a surgeon spieling to a shill about a new miracle ingredient that revolutionises personal hygiene. Janever breaks in on the recording to explain that, as the listener will notice, the voice of the subject will take on more and more of a brogue as her mind engages with the Irish past — and then the voice of the subject, slack-jawed and stertorous, like one under gas, continues in exactly the same tone as when she was delving into her childhood age groups in America. This is how the Pueblo subject talks about her courtship:

Q. (a leading *Q.*, like nearly all of them): Brian came to your house?

B. M.: Uh-huh.

Q: When you were seventeen?

B. M.: Uh-huh.

Now there is many an answer that an Irish girl would give to a query about her young and burgeoning love, but by all the powers that be it would never be *Uh-huh*. That sounds like the young Shirley Temple in a Little Miss Ringlets role; never was it heard in Ireland, never from a girl called Bridey Murphy more than a century ago.

If there was a Bridey Murphy she would have answered so: "He came to my house, I recall, when I was around seventeen. The house, you know, is not very big, big enough, but nothing grand about it you understand, and we were all in the parlor, waiting for him. Now I was wearing . . ." and so on in a long meandering string of reminiscence, taking the listener into her home with her, meeting the family, explaining calmly enough now, after all the years, the nature of the courting. Could anything be vaguer that the subject's account of these days of young love? It is more than a question of knowledge, of intonation, it is a question of the very essence. There is a constant jarring note in the whole of the series of interviews.

When she was asked what kind of a house she was living in she replied:

"Uh . . . it's a nice house . . . it's a wood house . . . white . . . has . . . two floors . . . has . . . I have a room upstairs . . . go up the stairs and turn to the left. It's very nice. . . ."

If there is one word of description that Americans, especially lady Americans, use and use and use, it is *nice*. One of the first memories that a stranger has of American ladies in conversation is the nicety of it. Bridey Murphy would have talked about her small house, her snug house, her home, but never

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would she have talked about a wood house, anymore than about an aluminum one. A wood house in Cork would have been and is as rare as that. The white-painted wooden house is almost an American symbol. There are no wooden houses in Cork.

The woods were cleaved in Ireland many centuries ago.

Daub and wattle made the homes in some parts, as on the lake isle of Innisfree, but stones, stones, were the material of nearly all Irish homes, and of the fences too. Wood was so rare that only an exotic chalet-type shelter, contiguous to a bowling green or a tennis court, would be built of wood, never a dwelling.

A Bridey Murphy might well marry a man called McCarthy — many of them did — but it is unlikely that his name would be Brian; it was later that the rising flood of nationalism brought back the old Irish names, recalled the glories of Brian Boy Magee and his father Owen Ban, and the name Sean or Shane (never See-an) belongs also to an earlier and to a later time. Duncan is a name that does not go with Murphy; it is as unlikely a combination as Rocco Evans would be in Llanelly, Glam., or Preserved Siciliani in Perugia, Italy. A Saint Teresa's church in Belfast is as anomalous to that time as is a wooden house in Cork. There is a Saint Teresa's church in Belfast, but it is a twentieth century foundation. The Saint Teresa honoured in Ireland, in the girls' names, in the churches, is the gentle maiden saint of Lisieux, she of the Child Jesus, who died late in the nineteenth century and whose cultus anticipated even her twentieth century canonisation, taking on the name of the earlier Saint Teresa, she of Avila, as a mantle. The names Cuchulain and Deirdre that she mentions were revived after centuries of silence by the Irish renaissance of literary nationalism, in the days of Lady Gregory, Douglas Hyde, J. M. Synge and William Yeats many years after the demise of this Bridey Murphy.

Her description of a wake sounds just like someone perforce answering a question without knowing anything about it save in the most general way, the way that everybody knows two Irish words, like *banshee* and *colleen*. A wake is a pious Christian custom where, in Ireland, the body of the dead one, decked in sombre Sunday clothes or in the religious garb of a tertiary order, is laid out in the coffin set in the best room of the house and there, for the three days following death, before interment, the friends and the relatives watch over it. There are blessed candles set at the head and the foot of the coffin, people drop in to gaze with sorrow at the face of the dead one, kneel down and pray for the repose of the soul, and then move in to one of the other rooms of the house where

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they sup tea, or maybe a drop of something stronger, and gently remember the days of the dead one, talk about the childhood and the growing up, occasionally stepping back into the best room to offer up another prayer or so. In times of great poverty and misery these getting-togethers were likely to be occasions for sorrow and bitterness to come breaking out, for strong drink to fume, but that was not the traditional way. It was a wholesome and holy way to comfort the dead with their prayers and the desolated household with their company. A balder description of a wake can barely be imagined than the words of this subject: "They all sit around and drink tea and everybody's unhappy."

That is not the way of a wake. Her description of a wake is about as dim as her description of the place where she went to after death. In both these answers to persistent interrogation her mumbles of answer are vague enough to enjoy almost a distinction.

There are barristers in Ireland; the name is an old and honoured name for those who plead in the courts of that most litigious land, but along with the word *barrister*, hardly an esoteric term, she uses the Americanism *downtown*. In Ireland people do go *up to town*, or *to the city*, but they never say *downtown*, unless they have picked it up from the American movies.

There are many names she uses that are strange to the Irish ear. She pronounces *leer* for *lyre*, and the lyre itself is something that an Irishman might hang on a wall maybe, as a mystery, for assuredly the lyre was as unknown in Ireland as a *linen* or an *Orange*. Yet these names, like *tup* and *brate*, all sound as if they might be Irish, they sound like words that people might make up to sound Irish.

It is not the misstatements, the vagueness, the ignorance that are so depressing; it is the downright dullness. Morey Bernstein tells his tale with the ardor and the single-mindedness of a zealot, telling how he saw hypnosis first of all as a party trick and then how fact remorselessly built on fact to make him draw the dead Bridey Murphy out of the mouth of his sleeping subject. He suppresses the fact that the real name of his subject was an Irish one, as has been reported by a Denver newspaperman, that most of the names he uses were found in her circle, but that does not matter so much either. The thing is, in common with so many others, he and his company want to move in on the Irish. Saint Patrick's Day in America is one of the saddest days of the year: the whole world wears paper hats, gnaws at pigs' knuckles, swills suds colored green, and sings Tin Pan Alley songs of a land that never was, thank God.

There is a glorious medieval tale of Ireland, *The Vision of Mac-*

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Conigle, and therein the subject, under control, like the Rocky Mountain lady, relates his memory. It is as far from the reality as is her own relation; but unlike hers his narrations, never stumbling, never prodded by leading questions, proceeded so:

"*Then I saw the door-keeper. Fair was the shape of that man; and his name was Bacon-lad, son of Butter-lad, son of Lard; with his smooth sandals of old bacon on his soles, and leggings of potmeat circling his shins, with his tunic of corned beef, and his girdle of salmon skin around him, with his hood of flummery about him, and a seven-filleted crown of butter on his head (in each fillet of which was the produce of seven ridges of pure leeks); with his seven badges of tripe about his neck, and seven bosses of boiled lard on the point of every badge of them; his steed of bacon under him, with its four legs of custard, with its four hoofs of coarse oaten bread under it, with its ears of curds, with its two eyes of honey in its head, with its streams of old cream in its nostrils, and a flux of bragget streaming down, with its tail of dulse, from which seven handfuls were pulled every day, with its smooth saddle of glorious choice lard upon it, with its face-band of the side of a heifer around its head, with its neck-band of old-wether spleen around its neck, with its little bell of cheese suspended from the neck-band, with its tongue of thick compact metal hanging down from the bell . . .*"

and so on flowingly did MacConigle relate, under possession, and so it has come down to us by word of mouth, in codices and now in translation, for more than seven hundred years. There is Irish telling in his account. Dullness is gone, and when an Irishman tells, with a schooled straight face, or maybe under control, of a man of a past time, he manages to make it interesting — or what purpose is there in telling?

There is not a single line in the account of Bridey Murphy to brighten the eye, to quicken the breath, to cause anything but a feeling of discomfort. The *brouhaha* that has attended the publication and the recording of this account is discouraging; it is a grave reflection upon the state of society. California is become, they say, the headquarters of this expedited enthusiasm, but it has attracted national attention and interest. The Bernstein business in Colorado began with the collection and the sale of scrap material; it has since burgeoned into a most flourishing commercial enterprise, and it seems that the business acumen and skill has carried over into the literary field. This is a calculated bit of business that will make a great deal of money.

The shame of it is that yet more harm will be done to the Irish memory by this deal. Bridey Murphy! To hear her truly would be like hearing from the dead of Passchendale or of Bapaume. Bridey

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Murphy is but another name for Cathleen ni Houlihan, for the Shan Van Vocht, for the Small Dark Rose. She was the Mother of the Croppy Boy; she loved Kelly the Boy from Killan. In the background of many of us there is a Bridey Murphy: it was the name of a great-grandmother, from Clonakilty, who married Daniel McCarthy from that same place, long ago. Clonakilty is in County Cork, fairly contiguous to the city. This Bridey has never spoken back through the mouths of strangers, but her tales, her memories, glow around today, unlike the guttering stumble of this Colorado research project.

Coming Next Month

The name of R. Bretnor is usually associated with the broadest of farce-comedy; but there isn't so much as a smile in his novelet, *The Past and Its Dead People*, a distinguished piece of fiction analysing the grim effects of a small dosage of extra-sensory perception on quiet everyday lives. The broad comedy in our September issue (on the stands around August 1) will come from Poul Anderson, in a wacky, *Unknown*-style novelet on the witchcraft of the future. There'll be short stories by Ward Moore, Idris Seabright, Evelyn E. Smith and other F&SF favorites, plus a special feature in advance of the World Science Fiction Convention: an article in which Robert Bloch attempts, sympathetically but objectively, to explain the science fiction *fan* to the science fiction *reader*.

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To be seasonable, this issue should contain a story celebrating the Fourth of July; but s.f. writers have been negligent in linking their imaginations with our greatest national holiday. We can, however, offer you this story of its French equivalent — Bastille Day, le quatorze juillet — *in which Anthony Brode (who has previously appeared in F&SF as a writer of deft parody verse) tells of a village festival, an interplanetary visitant, and a priest of much simpler and more direct mind than the Albertian Brothers of St. Leibowitz.*

The Fourteenth of July

by ANTHONY BRODE

THE CREATURE CAME FROM AN ARID planet; when it landed silently among Papa Guichet's olive trees it sprayed around with a nozzle which protruded from its otherwise shapeless form until the sap dried up and the green leaves withered and the creature felt more comfortable. The stony soil fell in a series of careful terraces to the Mediterranean, but the creature was not aware of height or color; it only sensed the threat of water, and dug itself in a little — waiting with its back, if it could be said to have a back, against a warm slab of rock.

"There is a dragon among your olive trees," little Marcel told Guichet on his way down the hill to help erect the Fourteenth of July decorations. His parents lived on a narrow shelf high in the rocky crescent which seemed to be pushing the little fishing village into the sea; the only track to the coastal strip zigzagged through Papa Guichet's small holding and past the gray stone cottage farther down the slope where he lived alone.

"What nonsense, boy!" said the old man.

"It breathes fire, I heard it" said Marcel without rancor. He ran off down the hill; dragons are commonplace if you are six years old and in a hurry.

Papa Guichet sniffed the air distrustfully; it was his boast he could forecast the *mistral* 24 hours before it came blowing over the mountains. . . . Overlaying the myrtle and the thyme and the smell of sunshine on rock was a heavy tang of smoke. He began to climb the slope.

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Excitement made him stumble and the creature turned its nozzle to the flurry of sound and the menacing moving humidity of blood. A hiss warned the old man and he flung himself on the ground; his second best hat, which he always wore in moments of crisis, was singed nevertheless.

Back on the arid planet a cluster of other creatures were made aware of the ludicrous spectacle of an earth-thing prostrating itself before the explorer. A ripple went round them as they learned of the incident, and a signal of appreciation reached the hot rock among the olive stumps.

Papa Guichet raised his head cautiously, saw only a gently undulating gray shadow, backed several meters on his stomach and ran as fast as he knew. His feet slipped on loose stones as he tore down the dusty path, past his cottage with the plain unpainted door still open and his black bitter coffee cooling on the untrimmed wood of the plank table, and down in a series of elbow bends to the point where the houses began.

The old women in their familiar shiny black looked curiously at him as he ran across the narrow Place Eisenhower (before the war it had been the Place Garibaldi) towards the Grand Bar des Iles du Levant, a one-story stone building fronted by a vine-covered wooden terrace which was the focal point of the village. The patron, a fat free-thinker by the name of Clairdoux, saw him coming and poured him a cognac with unhurried care. When the old man was near enough for his expression to be seen Clairdoux poured another rather more hastily, and the bottoms of their two glasses rang back on the counter at the same moment.

"Among my olive trees," gasped Papa Guichet. "A thing . . . a gray thing without eyes which breathes fire."

The bar began to fill with villagers who had seen him running; their numbers were increased by a youth who swooped across the square on a bicycle repeating the story. Soon everyone in St-Pierre-de-la-Corniche knew that Papa Guichet was drunk, had gone mad, was chasing the Widow Triquelle into the harbour, had set fire to his cottage, had slit the curé's throat, had seen a flying saucer.

Une soucoupe volante sounds less impressive in French, language of the kitchen, than other languages; whatever Papa Guichet had seen there was no cause to delay the celebration of France's National Day any longer. The children went on putting up the bunting and preparing a bonfire in the village square. So many people were anxious to hear the story first-hand that Papa Guichet's anxiety dwindled among the glasses and soon drowned — or at least was preserved in alcohol.

Stimulated by the midsummer heat of the Provençal sun, the gray creature dragged itself out from

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among the charred olive trees and slowly slithered from terrace to terrace; vines, fruit trees and all green things were dried and blackened in its path. Nobody in the village saw its long-drawn-out descent; it was the one day in the year when a straight black streak down the hillside could remain unobserved and the strengthening smell of smoke stay undetected, lost among the headier sights and scents of celebration.

As it grew dark the fire in the Place Eisenhower was lit and the dancing began to a solitary accordion. The burning gave a great heat — heat which acted as a magnet to the creature as the warmth of the sun faded. The fire was a defense between it and the wet menace of the sea.

Clairdoux was the first to see it, slithering along the path by which Guichet had come earlier in the day. A hand on his throat, he screamed wordlessly and pointed; but Clairdoux had been known to do this before, and regular visitors to the Grand Bar des Iles du Levant said it proved that he drank stronger stuff than he sold. Nobody took any notice until little Marcel, dodging in and out of the dancers, shouted a moment later "Look — Papa Guichet's dragon!"

It moved uncertainly from the shadow of the alley into the village square. The accordionist stopped playing and the dancers stampeded to the bar behind the protection of the flames. A single scream slit the silence; then only the fire crackled. Its light flickered over the creature's skin; or was it armor? Overlapping scales rippled as it basked like a lamb-sized mound of jelly in the warmth.

"It burned my olive trees!" Papa Guichet, besotted with drink and fury, struggled through the cowering dancers. He pulled a burning plank from the edge of the fire and hurled it at the intruder. The plank missed and broke in a shower of sparks; a convulsion shook the creature, and on the arid planet the watchers were again aware of the incongruity of human behaviour.

Papa Guichet seized a burning branch. One by one, others followed his example and soon the creature was ringed by fire. It did not appear in the least inconvenienced.

The people of St-Pierre-de-la-Corniche were not uniformly devout, but practically all of them expected Father Dubocq to resolve their crises. No expert in theology, the village priest succeeded by the application of a rough-and-ready commonsense backed by the authority of tradition. "It is the work of the devil," he exclaimed as he saw the indeterminate gray movement at the heart of the scarlet fire.

"It is the devil himself," muttered Clairdoux, and then felt somewhat embarrassed. It seemed illogical to deny the good and admit the bad.

Father Dubocq looked at him sharply. "*In vino veritas*," he said.

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"It is possible that you are right."

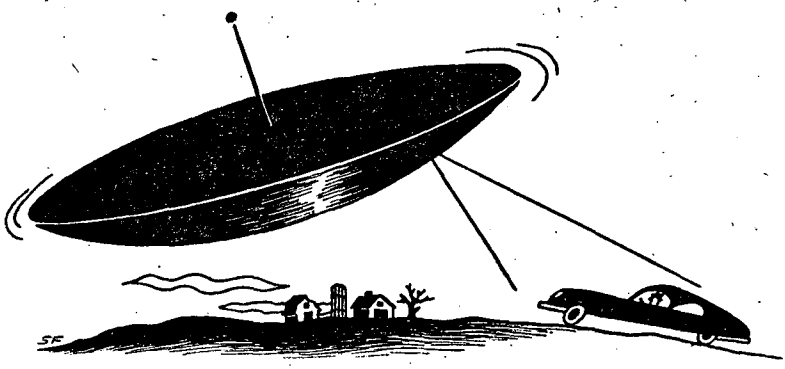
"What can you do?" Papa Guichet emerged tearful-drunk.

"Do? I shall sprinkle it with holy water. I shall need a lot . . . several buckets. Six would probably suffice."

The villagers were reassured by this evidence that the degree of evil could be so precisely measured. Water was brought, blessed, and thrown on the fire until it steamed. The creature retreated a few paces, manufacturing defensive heat through its own fire-breather. Finally Father Dubocq caught it right on the nozzle with half a pailful of hot water.

A low humming noise grew quickly to a shriek and the creature became invisible, traveling suddenly in time as well as space. Slowly the villagers rebuilt the fire. The accordionist picked up his instrument; soon one couple began to dance, then another, then two more. "He does his job well, that one," Clairdoux admitted with a grudging nod at the back of the retreating priest.

Back on the arid planet, another expedition was already being planned to a world where the natives might be more friendly and equipped with a better sense of humor.



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It's appropriate that our most nomadic contributor should send in (from the International Zone of Tangiers) this tale of international and supranational finance, revealing how an investment of a mere half dozen gold pieces, made at the right time, can shape the fate of the world.

Compounded Interest

by MACK REYNOLDS

THE STRANGER SAID IN MISERABLE Italian, "I wish to see Sior Marin Goldini on business."

The concierge's manner was suspicious. Through the wicket he ran his eyes over the newcomer's clothing. "On business, Sior?" He hesitated. "Possibly, Sior, you could inform me as to the nature of your business, so that I might inform his *Zelenza*'s secretary, Vico Letta . . ." He let his sentence dribble away.

The stranger thought about that. "It pertains," he said finally, "to gold." He brought a hand from his pocket and opened it to disclose a half dozen yellow coins.

"A moment, *Lustrissimo*," the servant blurted quickly. "Forgive me. Your costume, *Lustrissimo* . . ." He let his sentence dribble away again and was gone.

A few moments later he returned to swing the door open wide. "If you please, *Lustrissimo*, his *Zelenza* awaits you."

He led the way down a vaulted hall to the central court, to the left past a fountain well to a heavy outer staircase supported by Gothic arches and sided by a carved parapet. They mounted, turned through a dark doorway and into a poorly lit corridor. The servant stopped and drummed carefully on a thick wooden door. A voice murmured from within and the servant held the door open and then retreated.

Two men were at a rough-hewn oak table. The older was heavy-set, tight of face and cold, and the other tall and thin and ever at ease. The latter bowed gently. He gestured and said, "His *Zelenza*, the Sior Marin Goldini."

The stranger attempted a clumsy bow in return, said awkwardly, "My name is . . . Mister Smith."

There was a moment of silence which Goldini broke finally by saying, "And this is my secretary, Vico Letta. The servant mentioned gold, Sior, and business."

The stranger dug into a pocket,

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came forth with ten coins which he placed on the table before him. Vico Letta picked one up in mild interest and examined it. "I am not familiar with the coinage," he said.

His master twisted his cold face without humor. "Which amazes me, my good Vico." He turned to the newcomer. "And what is your wish with these coins, Sior Mister Smith? I confess, this is confusing."

"I want," Mister Smith said, "to have you invest the sum for me."

Vico Letta had idly weighed one of the coins in question on a small scale. He cast his eyes up briefly as he estimated. "The ten would come to approximately forty-nine zecchini, *Zelenza*," he murmured.

Marin Goldini said impatiently, "Sior, the amount is hardly sufficient for my house to bother with. The bookkeeping alone —"

The stranger broke in. "Don't misunderstand. I realize the sum is small. However, I would ask but ten percent, and would not call for an accounting for . . . for one hundred years."

The two Venetians raised puzzled eyebrows. "A hundred years, Sior? Perhaps your command of our language . . ." Goldini said politely.

"One hundred years," the stranger said.

"But surely," the head of the house of Goldini protested, "it is unlikely that any of we three will be alive. As God desires, possibly even the house of Goldini will be a memory only."

Vico Letta, intrigued, had been calculating rapidly. Now he said, "In one hundred years, at ten percent compounded annually, your gold would be worth better than 700,000 zecchini."

"Quite a bit more, if I am not mistaken," the stranger said firmly.

"A comfortable sum," Goldini nodded, beginning to feel some of the interest of his secretary. "And during this period, all decisions pertaining to the investment of the amount would be in the hands of my house?"

"Exactly." The stranger took a sheet of paper from his pocket, tore it in two, and handed one half to the Venetians. "When my half of this is presented to your descendants, one hundred years from today, the bearer will be due the full amount."

"Done, Sior Mister Smith!" Goldini said. "An amazing transaction, but done. Ten percent in this day is small indeed to ask."

"It is enough. And now may I make some suggestions? You are perhaps familiar with the Polo family?"

Goldini scowled. "I know Sior Maffeo Polo."

"And his nephew, Marco?"

Goldini said cautiously, "I understand young Marco was captured by the Genoese. Why do you ask?"

"He is writing a book on his adventures in the Orient. It would be a well of information for a merchant house interested in the East. Another thing. In a few years there will

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be an attempt on the Venetian government and shortly thereafter a Council of Ten will be formed which will eventually become the supreme power of the republic. Support it from the first and make every effort to have your house represented."

They stared at him and Marin Goldini crossed himself unobtrusively.

The stranger said, "If you find need for profitable investments beyond Venice I suggest you consider the merchants of the Hanse cities and their soon to be organized League."

They continued to stare and he said, uncomfortably, "I'll go now. Your time is valuable." He went to the door, opened it himself and left.

Marin Goldini snorted. "That liar, Marco Polo."

Vico said sourly, "How could he have known we were considering expanding our activities in to the East? We have discussed it only between ourselves."

"The attempt on the government," Marin Goldini said, crossing himself again. "Was he hinting that our intriguing is known? Vico, perhaps we should disassociate ourselves from the conspirators."

"Perhaps you are right, *Zellenza*," Vico muttered. He picked up one of the coins again and examined it, back and front. "There is no such nation," he grumbled, "but the coin is perfectly minted." He picked up the torn sheet of paper, held it to the light. "Nor have I ever seen such paper, *Zellenza*, nor such a strange language, although, on closer examination it appears to have some similarities to the English tongue."

The House of Letta-Goldini was located now in the San Toma district, an imposing structure through which passed the proceeds of a thousand ventures in a hundred lands.

Riccardo Letta looked up from his desk at his assistant. "Then he really has appeared? *Per favore*, Lio, bring me the papers pertaining to the, ah, account. Allow me a matter of ten minutes to refresh my memory and then bring the Sior to me."

The great grandson of Vico Letta, head of the House of Letta-Goldini, came to his feet elegantly, bowed in the sweeping style of his day, said, "Your servant, Sior . . ."

The newcomer bobbed his head in a jerky, embarrassed return of the courtesy, said, "Mister Smith."

"A chair, *Lustrissimo*? And now, pray pardon my abruptness. One's duties when responsible for a house of the magnitude of Letta-Goldini . . ."

Mister Smith held out a torn sheet of paper. His Italian was abominable. "The agreement made with Marin Goldini, exactly one century ago."

Riccardo Letta took the paper. It was new, clean and fresh, which brought a frown to his high forehead. He took up an aged, yellowed fragment from before him and placed one against the other. They matched

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to perfection. "Amazing, Sior, but how can it be that my piece is yellow with age and your own so fresh?"

Mister Smith cleared his throat. "Undoubtedly, different methods have been used to preserve them."

"Undoubtedly." Letta relaxed in his chair, placed fingertips together. "And undoubtedly you wish your capital and the interest it has accrued. The amount is a sizable one, Sior; our house shall find it necessary to call in various accounts."

Mister Smith shook his head. "I want to continue on the original basis."

Letta sat upright. "You mean for another hundred years?"

"Precisely. I have faith in your management, Sior Letta."

"I see." Riccardo Letta had not maintained his position in the cut-throat world of Venetian banking and commerce by other than his own ability. It took him only a moment to gather himself. He took up another paper from before him and said, "The appearance of your ancestor, Sior, has given rise to a veritable legend in this house. You are familiar with the details?"

The other nodded, warily.

"He made several suggestions, among them that we support the Council of Ten. We are now represented on the Council, Sior. I need not point out the advantage. He also suggested we investigate the travels of Marco Polo, which we failed to do — but should have. Above all in strangeness was his recommendation that investments be made in the Hanse towns which eventually formed their Hanseatic League."

"Well, and wasn't that a reasonable suggestion?"

"Profitable, Sior, but hardly reasonable. Your ancestor appeared in the year 1300 but the Hanseatic League wasn't formed until 1358."

The small man, strangely garbed in much the same manner tradition had it the first Mister Smith had appeared, twisted his face wryly. "I am afraid I am in no position to explain, Sior. And now, my own time is limited, and, in view of the present size of my investment, I am going to request you have drawn up a contract more binding than the largely verbal one made with the founders of your house."

Riccardo Letta rang a small bell on his desk and the next hour was spent with assistants and secretaries. At the end of that period, Mister Smith, a sheaf of documents in his hands, said, "And now may I make a few suggestions?"

Riccardo Letta leaned forward, his eyes narrow. "By all means."

"Your house will continue to grow and you will have to think in terms of spreading to other nations. Continue to back the Hanse cities. In the not too far future a remarkable man named Jacques Coeur will become prominent in France. Bring him into the firm as French representative. However, all support should be withdrawn from him in the year 1450."

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Mister Smith stood up, preparatory to leaving. "One warning, Sior Letta. As a fortune grows large, the jackals gather. I suggest the magnitude of this one be hidden and diffused. In this manner temporary set-backs may be suffered through the actions of this prince, or that revolution, but the fortune will continue."

Riccardo Letta was not an overly religious man, but after the other had left he crossed himself as had his predecessor.

There were twenty of them waiting in the year 1500. They sat about a handsome conference table, representatives of half a dozen nations, arrogant of mien, sometimes cruel of face. Waldemar Gotland acted as chairman.

"Your Excellency," he said in passable English, "may we assume this is your native language?"

Mister Smith was taken aback by the number of them, but, "You may," he said.

"And that you wish to be addressed as Mister Smith in the English fashion?"

Smith nodded. "That will be acceptable."

"Then, sir, if you will, your papers. We have named a committee, headed by Emil de Hanse, to examine them as to authenticity."

Smith handed over his sheaf of papers. "I desired," he complained, "that this investment be kept secret."

"And it has been to the extent possible, Excellency. Its size is now fantastic. Although the name Letta-Goldini is still kept, no members of either family still survive. During the past century, Excellency, numerous attempts have been made to seize your fortune."

"To be expected," Mister Smith said interestedly. "And what foiled them?"

"Principally the number involved in its management, Excellency. As a representative from Scandinavia, it is hardly to my interest to see a Venetian or German corrupt The Contract."

Antonio Ruzzini bit out, "Nor to our interest to see Waldemar Gotland attempt it. There has been blood shed more than once in the past century, *Zellenza*."

The papers were accepted as authentic.

Gotland cleared his throat. "We have reached the point, Excellency, where the entire fortune is yours, and we merely employees. As we have said, attempts have been made on the fortune. We suggest, if it is your desire to continue its growth . . ."

Mister Smith nodded here.

". . . that a stronger contract, which we have taken the liberty to draw up, be adopted."

"Very well, I'll look into it. But first, let me give you my instructions."

There was an intake of breath and they sat back in their chairs.

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Mister Smith said, "With the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, Venetian power will drop. The house must make its center elsewhere."

There was a muffled exclamation.

Mister Smith went on. "The fortune is now considerable enough that we can afford to take a long view. We must turn our eyes westward. Send a representative of the fortune to Spain. Shortly, the discoveries in the west will open up investment opportunities there. Support men named Hernando Cortez and Francisco Pizarro. In the middle of the century withdraw our investments from Spain and enter them in England, particularly in commerce and manufacture. There will be large land grants in the new world; attempt to have representatives of the fortune gain some of them. There will be confusion at the death of Henry VIII; support his daughter Elizabeth.

"You will find, as industry expands in the northern countries, that it is impractical for a manufacturer to operate where there are literally scores of saints' days and fiestas. Support such religious leaders as demand a more, ah, puritanical way of life."

He wound it up. "One other thing. This group is too large. I suggest that only one person from each nation involved be admitted to the secret of the contract."

"Gentlemen," Mister Smith said in 1600, "turn more to manufacture and commerce in Europe, to agriculture, mining and accumulation of large areas of real estate in the New World. Great fortunes will be made this century in the East; be sure that our various houses are first to profit."

They waited about the conference table in London. The clock, periodically and nervously checked, told them they had a full fifteen minutes before Mister Smith was expected.

Sir Robert took a pinch of snuff, presented an air of nonchalance he did not feel.

"Gentlemen," he said deliberately, "frankly I find it difficult to believe the story legend. Come now, after everything has been said, what does it boil down to?"

Pierre Deflage said softly, "It is a beautiful story, *messieurs*. In the year 1300 a somewhat bedraggled stranger appeared before a Venetian banking house and invested ten pieces of gold, the account to continue for a century. He made certain suggestions that would have tried the abilities of Nostradamus. Since then his descendants have appeared each century at this day and hour and reinvested the amount, never collecting a *sou* for their own use, but always making further suggestions. Until now, *messieurs*, we have reached the point where it is by far the largest fortune in the world. I, for instance, am considered the wealthiest man in France." He shrugged eloquently. "While we all

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know I am but an employee of The Contract."

"I submit," Sir Robert said, "that the story is impossible. It has been one hundred years since our *Mr. Smith* has supposedly appeared. During that period there have been ambitious men and unscrupulous men in charge of The Contract. They concocted this fantastic tale for their own ends. Gentlemen, there is no Mr. Smith and never was a Mr. Smith. The question becomes, shall we continue the farce, or shall we take measures to divide the fortune and each go our own way?"

A small voice from the doorway said, "If you think that possible, sir, we shall have to work still more to make the contract iron bound. May I introduce myself? You may call me Mr. Smith."

In 1800 he said: "You are to back, for twelve years, the adventurer Bonaparte. In 1812 drop him. You are to invest largely in the new nation, the United States. Send a representative to New York immediately. This is to be a century of revolution and change. Withdraw support from monarchy . . ."

There was a gasp from around the table.

". . . and support the rising commercial classes. Back a certain Robert Clive in India. Withdraw all support of Spain in Latin America. In the American civil war to come, back the North.

"Largely, gentlemen, this is to be the century of England. Remember that." He looked away for a moment, off into an unknown distance. "Next century will be different, but that's another story and not even I know what lies beyond its middle."

After he was gone, Amschel Mayer, representative from Vienna, murmured, "Colleagues, have you realized that at last one of The Contract relics makes sense?"

Lord Windermere scowled at him, making small attempt to disguise his anti-semitism. "What'd'ya mean by that, sir?"

The international banker opened the heavy box which contained the documents handed down since the day of Goldini. He emerged with a medium sized gold coin. "One of the original invested coins has been retained all these centuries, My Lord."

Windermere took it and read. "The United States of America. Why, confound it, man, this is ridiculous. Someone has been a-pranking. The coin couldn't have existed in Goldini's day; the colonies proclaimed their independence less than twenty-five years ago."

Amschel Mayer murmured, "And the number at the bottom of the coin. I wonder if anyone has ever considered that it might be a date."

Windermere stared at the coin again. "A date? Don't be an ass! One does not date a coin more than a century ahead of time."

Mayer rubbed his beardless face

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with a thoughtful hand. "More than six centuries ahead of time, My Lord."

Over cigars and brandy, they went into the question in detail. Young Warren Piedmont said, "You gentlemen have the advantage of me. Until two years ago I knew only vaguely of The Contract in spite of my prominence in the American branch of the hierarchy. And, unfortunately, I was not present when Mr. Smith appeared in 1900 as were the rest of you."

"You didn't miss a great deal," Von Borman growled. "Our Mr. Smith, who has all of us tied so tightly with The Contract that everything we own, even to this cigar I hold in my hand, is his — our Mr. Smith is insignificant, all but threadbare."

"Then there actually is such a person," Piedmont said.

Albert Marat, the French representative, snorted expressively. "Amazingly enough, Messieurs, his description, even to his clothes, is exactly that handed down from Goldini's day to this." He chuckled. "We have one advantage this time."

Piedmont frowned. "Advantage?"

"Unbeknown to Mr. Smith, we took a photo of him when he appeared in 1900. It will be interesting to compare it with his next appearance."

Warren Piedmont continued to frown his lack of understanding and Hideka Mitsuki explained. "You have not read the novels of the British writer, the so clever Mr. H. G. Wells?"

"Never heard of him."

Smith-Winston, of the British branch, said, "To sum it up, Piedmont, we have discussed the possibility that our Mr. Smith is a time traveler."

"Time traveler! What in the world do you mean?"

"This is the year 1910. In the past century science has made strides beyond the conception of the most advanced scholars of 1810. What strides will be made in the next fifty years, we can only conjecture. That they will even embrace travel in time is mind-twisting for us, but not impossible."

"But why fifty years from now? It will be a full century before —"

"No. This time Mr. Smith informed us that he is not to wait until the year 2000 for his visit. He is scheduled for July 16, 1960. At that time, friends, I am of the opinion that we shall find what our Mr. Smith has in mind to do with the greatest fortune the world has ever seen."

Von Borman looked about him and growled, "Has it occurred to you that we eight men are the only persons in the world who even know The Contract exists?" He touched his chest. "In Germany, not even the Kaiser knows that I directly own — in the name of The Contract, of course — or control possibly two thirds of the corporate wealth of the Reich."

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Marat said, "And has it occurred to you that all our Monsieur Smith need do is demand his wealth and we are penniless?"

Smith-Weston chuckled bitterly. "If you are thinking in terms of attempting to do something about it, forget it. For half a millennium the best legal brains of the world have been strengthening The Contract. Wars have been fought over attempts to change it. Never openly, of course. Those who died did so of religion, national destiny, or national honor . . . they thought. But never has the attempt succeeded. The Contract goes on."

Piedmont said, "To get back to this 1960 appearance promised. Why do you think that Smith will reveal his purpose, if this fantastic belief of yours is correct, that he is a time traveler?"

"It all fits in, old man," Smith-Winston told him. "Since Goldini's turn he has been turning up in clothing not too dissimilar to what we wear today. He speaks English — with an American accent. The coins he first gave Goldini were American double-eagles minted in this century. We can assume that they are of his own generation. Sum it up. For some reason, our Mr. Smith was desirous of creating an enormous fortune. He has done so and it is my belief that in 1960 we shall find out his purpose."

He sighed and went back to his cigar. "I am afraid I shall not see it. Fifty years is a long time."

They left the subject finally and went to another almost as close to their hearts.

Von Borman growled, "I contend that if The Contract is to be served, Germany needs a greater place in the sun. I intend to construct a Berlin to Baghdad railroad and to milk the East of its treasures."

Marat and Smith-Winston received his words coldly. "I assure you, monsieur," Marat said, "we shall have to resist any such plans on your part. The Contract can best be served by maintaining the status quo; there is no room for German expansion. If you persist in this, it will mean war and you recall what Mr. Smith prophesied. In case of war, we are to withdraw support from Germany and, for some reason, Russia, and support the allies. We warn you, Borman."

"This time Mr. Smith was wrong," Borman growled. "As he said, oil is to be invested in above all, and how can Germany secure oil without access to the East? My plans will succeed and the cause of The Contract will thus be forwarded."

The quiet Hideka Mitsuki murmured, "When Mr. Smith first invested his pieces of gold I wonder if he realized the day would come when the different branches of his fortune would plan and carry out international conflicts in the name of The Contract?"

There were only six of them gathered around the circular table in the

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Empire State suite when he entered. None had been present at his last appearance and of them all only Warren Piedmont had ever met and conversed with anyone who had actually seen Mr. Smith.

Now the octogenarian held up an aged photograph and compared it to the newcomer. "Yes," he muttered, "they were right."

Mr. Smith handed over an envelope heavy with paper. "Don't you wish to check these?"

Piedmont looked about the table. Besides himself, there was John Smith-Winston, the second, from England; Rami Mardu, from India; Warner Voss-Richer, of West Germany; Mito Fisuki, of Japan; Juan Santos, representing Italy, France and Spain. Piedmont said, "We have here a photo taken of you in 1900, sir; it is hardly necessary to identify you further. I might add, however, that during the past ten years we have had various celebrated scientists at work on the question of whether or not time travel was possible."

Mr. Smith said, "So I have realized. In short, you have spent my money in investigating me."

There was little of apology in Piedmont's voice. "We have faithfully, some of us for all our adult lives, protected The Contract. I will not deny that the pay is the highest in the world; however it is only a *job*. Part of the job consists of protecting The Contract and your interests from those who would fraudulently appropriate the fortune. We spend millions every year in conducting investigations."

"You're right, of course. But your investigations into the possibilities of time travel . . . ?"

"Invariably the answer was that it was impossible. Only one of the physicists consulted offered a glimmer of possibility."

"Ah, and who was that?"

"A Professor Alan Shirey who does his research at one of the California universities. We were careful, of course, not to hire his services directly. When first approached he admitted he had never considered the problem but he became quite intrigued. However, he finally stated his opinion that the only solution would involve the expenditure of an amount of power so great that there was no such quantity available."

"I see," Mr. Smith said wryly. "And following this period for which you hired the professor, did he discontinue his investigations into time travel?"

Piedmont made a vague gesture. "How would I know?"

John Smith-Winston interrupted stiffly. "Sir, we have all drawn up complete accountings of your property. To say it is vast is an understatement beyond even an Englishman. We should like instructions on how you wish us to continue."

Mr. Smith looked at him. "I wish to begin immediate steps to liquidate."

"Liquidate!" six voices ejaculated.

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"I want cash, gentlemen," Smith said definitely. "As fast as it can be accomplished, I want my property converted into cash."

Warner Voss-Richer said harshly, "Mr. Smith, there isn't enough coinage in the world to buy your properties."

"There is no need for there to be. I will be spending it as rapidly as you can convert my holdings into gold or its credit equivalent. The money will be put back into circulation over and over again."

Piedmont was aghast. "But *why?*" He held his hands up in dismay. "Can't you realize the repercussions of such a move? Mr. Smith, you must explain. The purpose of all this. . . ."

Mr. Smith said, "The purpose should be obvious. And the pseudonym of Mr. Smith is no longer necessary. You may call me Shirey — Professor Alan Shirey. You see, gentlemen, the question with which you presented me, whether or not time travel was possible, became consumingly interesting. I have finally solved, I believe, all the problems involved. I need now only a fantastic amount of power to activate my device. Given such an amount of power, somewhat more than is at present produced on the entire globe, I believe I shall be able to travel in time."

"But, but *why?* All this, all this . . . Cartels, governments, wars . . ." Warren Piedmont's aged voice wavered, faltered.

Mr. Smith — Professor Alan Shirey — looked at him strangely. "Why, so that I may travel back to early Venice where I shall be able to make the preliminary steps necessary for me to secure sufficient funds to purchase such an enormous amount of power output."

"And six centuries of human history," said Rami Mardu, Asiatic representative, so softly as hardly to be heard. "Its meaning is no more than this . . . ?"

Professor Shirey looked at him impatiently.

"Do I understand you to contend, sir, that there have been other centuries of human history with more meaning?"

Note:

If you enjoy The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, you will like some of the other Mercury Publications:

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
Mercury Mystery Book-Magazine
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There's something exotic about the dark Hungarian opulence of Garen Drussaï; but she writes strictly as an American as she feelingly extrapolates the fate of the housewife in an age of the ultimate development of competitive salesmanship.

Woman's Work

by GAREN DRUSSAÏ

SHEILA SAT INSTANTLY UP IN BED, her eyes wide awake and startled. The alarm on her wrist was giving off small electric shocks. *Someone was coming up the walk!* She turned it off quickly and looked at the clock.

Only ten minutes after four. It was still dark outside. She sighed wearily as she thought of the difficult task that lay before her in these next few minutes.

Hal's voice whispered tensely from beside her. "Is it time yet?"

"Yes," she answered. "They seem to come earlier each day." She slipped out of bed and hurriedly put on a robe. Then she turned on a small light and carefully picked up a number of gadgets from her night table, putting them into the outsize pockets of her robe.

Hal twisted anxiously in the bed as he watched her preparations. "Are you sure you've got enough this time?" he finally asked. "We just can't go on this way. We've got to lick them!"

Sheila bent over Hal tenderly and kissed him. "Don't worry, darling. This is my job. I'll do my best." She straightened up, grimly, as the door bell rang.

As she opened the front door the shocking brightness of sunshine flooded her face. She blinked rapidly to accustom her eyes to the brilliance of it. Then, in a moment, she saw him. He was quite young and nice-looking. What a shame, she thought bitterly, that they had to be enemies.

He was doing calisthenics on the front lawn, his jumping belt taking him yards up at a time. She watched him almost hypnotically, her head going up and down, up and down, up — frantically she sought a button concealed on the door jamb and pressed it. Instantly the gravity control started working and the young man, his jumping belt now useless, took it off and came toward her.

"Good — *good* — GOOD morning!"

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He beamed at her. "Isn't this a wonderful day? Look at all this lovely sunshine." He extended his arms in a sweeping gesture. "And all for you — you lucky lady!"

A slight smile turned up the corners of Sheila's mouth. She'd show him, she thought. She'd prick his Sunshine Bubble right now. She pressed another button on the door — and immediately the sun was blotted out and pre-dawn night surrounded them.

"Aha!" The young man scarcely seemed surprised. "You have your little jokes. Well, now that you've had some fun outwitting me, suppose you let me give you a little gift. Just as a friendly token from my company to you."

He held a small box out to her as she twisted a dial set into the door handle. Suddenly a heavy downpour descended all around the front door. Sheila couldn't help herself. She burst into laughter at his dismay. Then before she realized it, he was inside the door . . . and she couldn't *stop* laughing. He had squirted some laugh powder at her.

That's when the young man started his sales pitch. She didn't know what he was selling. Even if she signed for it, she still wouldn't know until it was delivered. Not when she was under the influence of a laugh drug. Then she thought of Hal lying there in the bedroom — trusting her to do her best. With superhuman effort she took a pill from her pocket and gulped it down between laughs. In a few moments the laughs subsided, and tears started streaming down her face.

The salesman was game. Sheila had to admit that. He kept talking, and his head started to shake affirmatively and positively — up and down, up and down. But Sheila, still crying, wasn't going to be taken in again by that hypnotic procedure. She slipped one of the gadgets on the back of her neck and set it to vibrating, and then soon she was shaking her head too — but negatively, from side to side.

She thought of her warm, comfortable bed and wished she was back in it. Suddenly she was — or thought she was, anyway. He was supporting her on a pneumatic float! Making her forget what she must do. Lulling her into a state of acceptance . . . This would never do. Hal wouldn't forgive her if she let him down. They just couldn't afford to buy one more thing.

She rushed over to the wall and, wiping the tears from her eyes so she could see, activated the Simulator. Then, instead of seeming to rest on a pneumatic couch, she felt the sharp ridges of a rocky ledge pressing into her flesh. She didn't care. The discomfort of it mattered little if she could win.

Sheila turned and looked at him. He was still talking away, as bright and animated as ever, still with, no doubt, a few tricks up his sleeve. Now, she thought, now while I still can, I'll give him all I've got! She

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slipped plugs into her ears, a rather difficult operation when her head was still shaking from side to side. Then in one quick sweep she flipped the playback switch on the tape recorder, letting loose a deafening mixture of the sound of babies wailing and dogs barking.

The salesman stopped talking, and Sheila knew he was about to get his noise deadener out of his pocket. With a cry of battle on her lips, she slapped an oxygen mask on her teary face and let loose a stench-bomb of so powerful and hideous an odor that the young man stopped, completely frozen. Finally, with a howl of anguish and frustration, he ran out into the chilly dawn.

Oh! How wonderful Sheila felt. The taste of triumph was sweet and delicious. She hastily deactivated all the gadgets (though it would be a few minutes before the effects wore off), then she purified the stench of the room, and suddenly feeling unbearably tired, she stumbled back into the bedroom.

Hal, still in bed, looked searchingly at her. She laughed — as well as she could with tears still running down her cheeks, head shaking from side to side, and the sharp rocks still digging into her.

"We won! Hal, we won!" she cried out, and collapsed on the bed.

Suddenly Sheila sat up, a shocked look on her face. "Hal," she said accusingly, "why are you still in bed? Do you realize it's four-thirty? I'm up and at my work by four o'clock. How do you expect me to make ends meet if you're not out working?"

Hal smiled at her, and stretched leisurely as he stood up.

"Don't worry, dear. I'm not loafing. I just got a terrific idea this morning. I'm going to let the other guys soften up my prospects at four and five in the morning." He stood looking down at her, a kind of dreamy, gloating look on his face.

"Then, when I give my pitch about six o'clock — just after they've been through a couple of *displays* — and just before they've had time for their morning coffee . . . Sheila, my love, they'll be pushovers!"

"Oh Hal," she said "how wonderful you are!"

He walked to the bathroom, and then turned, just at the door.

"Now you watch out, Sheila. Watch out for those six-o'clock-pitches. Don't *you* fall for them!"

She looked numbly after him, thinking of the hours ahead till she could escape to the shops and shows that made up her day. Then she straightened up determinedly.

After all, this was woman's work.

The alarm on her wrist was giving off small electric shocks. *Someone was coming up the walk!*

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

FROM 1949 TO 1954, THE ANNUAL collection of BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty maintained too high a standard of quality to fear any competition. There were other attempts at "best" annuals — a negligible one in 1953 by something calling itself the Jules Verne Award Committee, and a truly challenging effort by August Derleth in 1954 — but neither "annual" continued beyond its first volume.

Last year, however, Bleiler left the team, and the acute editorial flair seemed to depart with him. Dikty's solo effort was less than distinguished; the time would seem to be ripe for a new annual-best anthologist — and here she is: Judith Merril, presenting S-F: THE YEAR'S GREATEST SCIENCE-FICTION AND FANTASY STORIES AND NOVELETTES (Gnome, $3.95*; Dell, 35¢).

Regular readers of these pages know that I consider Merril, by quite a sizable margin, the most tasteful, catholic and consistent anthologist in our field; and in this first annual (for here one can be reasonably sure of the future of the series) she has produced an unusually fine volume even by her own standards.

The book contains 18 stories: 5 novelets and 13 shorts, plus an excellent summation of the past year in s.f. and a checklist of 82 "honorable mention" stories. To list those I think outstanding would mean reprinting almost the entire contents page: Sturgeon, Henderson, Clifton, Clingerman, Kuttner-Moore and so on and on. Most of the stories are from the "Big Three" (*Astounding*, *Galaxy* and F&SF), but there are also selections from other s.f. magazines, from slicks, from a British periodical and from a book. And the types are as varied as the sources — from "strict" science fiction through human interest stories to humorous caprice.

So go to it. A reviewer would have to have read as widely as Miss Merril to judge whether these are really "the year's greatest" stories; but there's a strong probability that this will be the year's best anthology.

Not that the competition is numerically strong. Anthologophilia, that peculiar hysteria of the early 1950's, is dying out; and Merril's is only the third s.f. anthology published for adult readers in 1956. But one anthology published as a juvenile (indeed, incomprehensibly limited, in the publisher's release,

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to the 10–14 age group) should interest any adult enthusiast. Andre Norton's SPACE POLICE (World, $2.75*) is the first specialized collection dealing with the future of law enforcement and detection, and a reasonably good one. A few of its 9 stories (all from adult magazines, chiefly *Astounding*, and only one previously reprinted) are wordy or unoriginal, but others range from good light whodunit-entertainment (by Crossen and Vance) to exciting fusions of the problems of Crime and Time (by Blish and Piper).

Report on recent Ace Double-Books (35¢ each): Most rewarding is D-155, a brandnew translation, by Willis T. Bradley, of Jules Verne's JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH. This is one of the earliest (1864) of Verne's *Voyages extraordinaires* and lacks the complexity of plot, character and humor which he later learned to introduce so skilfully; but the straightforward narrative of subterranean exploration is exciting enough in itself, with some still-provocative conjectures as to a region which, even today, we know less well than the surface of Luna or Mars. It's to be hoped that Ace will continue indefinitely with this admirable project of presenting the works of the master *voyagiste* in fresh new words so much more readable than the usually reprinted 19th Century hack versions.

D-162 is easy to skip: THE MAN WHO LIVED FOREVER, by R. DeWitt Miller and Anna Hunger, is a mildly amusing romantic melodrama of 3097 with no relation to science fiction, and Jerry Sohl's THE MARS MONOPOLY is the ultimate example of labeling a routine western as s.f. because it is set on Mars. D-150, however, offers two rewarding if provokingly imperfect novels, Margaret St. Clair's AGENT OF THE UNKNOWN and Philip K. Dick's THE WORLD JONES MADE. The St. Clair story, which appeared in *Startling* four years ago as VULCAN'S DOLLS, makes little sense as fantasy and none as s.f.; but it is invested with the St. Clair-Seabright aura of haunting beauty and sadness — you will recall its moods and visual images when you have mercifully forgotten the plot. The Dick novel is about *a*) a genetic scheme for colonizing Venus, much like James Blish's *pantropy; b*) the paradoxes of precognition; *c*) a wholly new kind of Alien Invader of Earth; *d*) lives gone awry in a bitterly Leiberish decadent society; *e*) the growth of a world-dominating religio-fascistic hate-movement — all in 62,000 words. It's too much material (and too many influences) for the best of novelists to assimilate into one coherent story; but here and there Dick verges on brilliance in both thinking and writing.

* Books marked with an asterisk may be purchased through F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details, see page 128.

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Earlier in this issue I quoted Heinlein's prophecy of the "mass psychoses" of "the sixth decade" of this century, and referred to the "saucer" hysteria as an example. Much — far too much — science fiction has been written about saucers, and far too little about saucerism, its causes and implications. Here the compassionate eye of Theodore Sturgeon contemplates a successful saucermonger and finds — well, as in all of the best Sturgeon stories, a little of the truth about all of us.

Fear Is a Business

by THEODORE STURGEON

JOSEPHUS MACARDLE PHILLIPSO is a man of destiny and he can prove it. His books prove it. The Temple of Space proves it.

A man of destiny is someone who is forced into things — big things — willy, as the saying goes, nilly. Phillipso, just for example, never meant to get into the Unidentified (except by Phillipso) Aerial Object business. This is to say, he didn't sit down like some of his less honest (according to Phillipso) contemporaries and say "I think I'll sit down and tell some lies about flying saucers and make some money." Everything that happened (Phillipso ultimately believed) just happened, and happened to happen to him. Might have been anybody. Then, what with one thing leading to another the way it does, well, you burn your forearm on an alibi and wind up with a Temple.

It was, on looking back on it (something which Phillipso never does any more), an unnecessary alibi devised for inadequate reasons. Phillipso merely calls the beginnings "inauspicious" and lets it go at that. The fact remains that it all started one night when he tied one on for no special reason except that he had just been paid his forty-eight dollars for writing advertising promotion copy for the Hincty Pincty Value Stores, and excused his absence on the following day with a story about a faulty lead on the spark coil of his car which took him most of the night to locate, and there he was stranded in the hills on the way back from a visit to his aging mother. The next night he did visit his aging mother and on the way back his car unaccountably quit and he spent most of the night fiddling with the electrical system until he discovered, just at dawn, a — well, there it was.

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At a time like that you just can't tell the truth. And while he was pondering various credible alternatives to veracity, the sky lit up briefly and shadows of the rocks and trees around him grew and slid away and died before he could even look up. It was a temperature inversion or a methane fireball or St. Elmo's fire or maybe even a weather balloon — actually that doesn't matter. He looked up at where it already wasn't, and succumbed to inspiration.

His car was parked on a grassy shoulder in a cut between two bluffs. Thick woods surrounded a small clearing to his right, a sloping glade sparsely studded with almost round moraine boulders, of all sizes. He quickly located three, a foot or so in diameter, equally spaced, and buried to approximately the same depth — *i.e.*, not much, Phillipso being merely an ingenious man, not an industrious one. These three he lifted out, being careful to keep his crepe-soled shoes flat on the resilient grass and to leave as few scuff-marks and indentations as possible. One by one he took the stones into the woods and dropped them into an evacuated foxhole and shoved some dead branches in on top of them. He then ran to his car and from the trunk got a blowtorch which he had borrowed to fix a leak in the sweated joint of a very old-fashioned bathtub in his mother's house, and with it thoroughly charred the three depressions in the ground where the boulders had lain.

Destiny had unquestionably been at work from the time he had beered himself into mendacity forty-eight hours before. But it became manifest at this point, for after Phillipso had licked his forearm lightly with the tongue of flame from the torch, extinguished the same and put it away, a car ground up the hill toward him. And it was not just any car. It belonged to a Sunday supplement feature writer named Penfield who was not only featureless at the moment, but who had also seen the light in the sky a half hour earlier. It may have been Phillipso's intention to drive into town with his story, and back with a reporter and cameraman, all to the end that he could show a late edition to his boss and explain this second absence. Destiny, however, made a much larger thing of it.

Phillipso stood in the graying light in the middle of the road and flapped his arms until the approaching car stopped. "They," he said hoarsely, "almost killed me."

From then on, as they say in the Sunday supplement business, it wrote itself. Phillipso offered not one blessed thing. All he did was answer questions, and the whole thing was born in the brain of this Penfield, who realized nothing except that here was the ideal interview subject. "Came down on a jet of fire, did it? Oh — *three* jets of fire." Phillipso took him into the glade and showed him the three scorched pits, still warm. "Threaten you, did they? Oh — all Earth. Threatened all Earth."

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Scribble scribble. He took his own pictures too. "What'd you do, speak right up to them? Hm?" Phillipso said he had, and so it went.

The story didn't make the Sunday supplements, but the late editions, just as Phillipso had planned, but much bigger. So big, as a matter of fact, that he didn't go back to his job at all; he didn't need it. He got a wire from a publisher who wanted to know if he, as a promotion writer, might be able to undertake a book.

He might and he did. He wrote with a crackling facility (*The first word in thrift, the last word in value* was his, and was posted all over the Hincty Pincty chain just as if it meant something) in a style homely as a cowlick and sincere as a banker's name-plate. *The Man Who Saved the Earth* sold two hundred and eighty thousand copies in the first seven months.

So the money started to come in. Not only the book money — the other money. This other money came from the end-of-the-world people, the humanity-is-just-too-wicked people, the save-us-from-the-spacemen folk. Clear across the spectrum, from people who believed that if God wanted us to fly through space we'd have been born with tail-fins to people who didn't believe in anything but Russians but would believe anything of them, people said "Save us!" and every crack on the pot dripped gold. Hence the Temple of Space, just to regularize the thing, you know, and then the lectures, and could Phillipso help it if half the congre — uh, club members called them services?

The sequel happened the same way, just appendixes to the first book, to handle certain statements he had made which some critics said made him fall apart by his own internal evidence. *We Need not Surrender* contradicted itself even more, was a third longer, sold three hundred and ten thousand in the first nine weeks, and brought in so much of that other money that Phillipso registered himself as an Institute and put all the royalties with it. The Temple itself began to show signs of elaboration, the most spectacular piece of which was the war surplus radar basket of a battleship that went round and round all the time. It wasn't connected to a damn thing but people felt that Phillipso had his eyes open. You could see it, on a clear day, from Catalina, especially at night after the orange searchlight was installed to rotate with it. It looked like a cosmic windshield wiper.

Phillipso's office was in the dome under the radar basket, and was reachable only from the floor below by an automatic elevator. He could commune with himself in there just fine, especially when he switched the elevator off. He had a lot of communing to do, too, sometimes detail stuff, like whether he could sustain a rally at the Coliseum and where to apply the ten thousand dollar grant from the Astrological Union which

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had annoyingly announced the exact size of the gift to the press before sending him the check. But his main preoccupation was another book, or what do I do for an encore? Having said that we are under attack, and then that we can rally and beat 'em, he needed an angle. Something new, preferably born by newsbeat out of cultural terror. And soon, too; his kind of wonder could always use another nine days.

As he sat alone and isolated in the amnion of these reflections, his astonishment can hardly be described at the sound of a dry cough just behind him, and the sight of a short sandy-haired man who stood there. Phillipso might have fled, or leapt at the man's throat, or done any number of violent things besides, but he was stopped cold by a device historically guaranteed to stem all raging authors: "I have," said the man, holding up one volume in each hand, "read your stuff."

"Oh, really?" asked Phillipso.

"I find it," said the man "logical and sincere."

Phillipso looked smilingly at the man's unforgettable bland face and his unnoticeable gray suit. The man said, "Sincerity and logic have this in common: neither need have anything to do with truth."

"Who are you," demanded Phillipso immediately, "What do you want and how did you get in here?"

"I am not, as you put it, in here," said the man. He pointed upward suddenly, and in spite of himself Phillipso found his eyes following the commanding finger.

The sky was darkening, and Phillipso's orange searchlight slashed at it with increasing authority. Through the transparent dome, just to the north, and exactly where his visitor pointed, Phillipso saw the searchlight pick out a great silver shape which hovered perhaps fifty feet away and a hundred feet above the Temple. He saw it only momentarily, but it left an afterimage in his retinae like a flashbulb. And by the time the light had circled around again and passed the place, the thing was gone. "I'm in that," said the sandy-haired man. "Here in this room I'm a sort of projection. But then," he sighed, "aren't we all?"

"You better explain yourself," said Phillipso loudly enough to keep his voice from shaking, "or I'll throw you out of here on your ear."

"You couldn't. I'm not here to be thrown." The man approached Phillipso, who had advanced away from his desk into the room. Rather than suffer a collision, Phillipso retreated a step and a step and another, until he felt the edge of his desk against his glutei. The sandy-haired man, impassive, kept on walking — to Phillipso, through Phillipso, Phillipso's desk, Phillipso's chair, and Phillipso's equanimity, the last-named being the only thing he touched.

"I didn't want to do that," said the man some moments later, bend-

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ing solicitously over Phillipso as he opened his eyes. He put out his hand as if to assist Phillipso to his feet. Phillipso bounced up by himself and cowered away, remembering only then that, on his own terms, the man could not have touched him. He crouched there, gulping and glaring, while the man shook his head regretfully. "I *am* sorry Phillipso."

"Who are you, anyway?" gasped Phillipso.

For the first time the man seemed at a loss. He looked in puzzlement at each of Phillipso's eyes, and then scratched his head. "I hadn't thought of that," he said musingly. "Important, of course, of course. Labeling." Focussing his gaze more presently at Phillipso, he said, "We have a name for you people that translates roughly to '*Labelers*.' Don't be insulted. It's a categorization, like '*biped*' or '*omnivorous*.' It means the mentality that verbalizes or it can't think."

"Who are you?"

"Oh, I do beg your pardon. Call me — uh, well, call me Hurensohn. I suggest that because I know you have to call me something, because it doesn't matter what you call me, and because it's the sort of thing you'll be calling me once you find out why I'm here."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Then by all means let's discuss the matter until you do."

"D-discuss what?"

"I don't have to show you that ship out there again?"

"Please," said Phillipso ardently, "don't."

"Now look," said Hurensohn gently, "There is nothing to fear, only a great deal to explain. Please straighten up and take the knots out of your thorax. That's better. Now sit down calmly and we'll talk the whole thing over. *There*, that's *fine!*" As Phillipso sank shakily into his desk chair, Hurensohn lowered himself into the easy chair which flanked it. Phillipso was horrified to see the half-inch gap of air which, for five seconds or so, separated the man from the chair. Then Hurensohn glanced down, murmured an apology, and floated down to contact the cushion somewhat more normally. "Careless, sometimes," he explained. "So many things to keep in mind at once. You get interested, you know, and next thing you're buzzing around without your light-warp or forgetting you hypno-field when you go in swimming, like that fool in Loch Ness."

"Are you really a — a — an extra-ulp?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. Extra-terrestrial, extra-solar, extra-galactic — all that."

"You don't, I mean, I don't see any —"

"I know I don't look like one. I don't look like this" — he gestured down his gray waistcoat with the tips of all his fingers — "either. I could show you what I really do look like, but that's inadvisable. It's been tried." He shook his head

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sadly, and said again, "Inadvisable."

"Wh-what do you want?"

"Ah. Now we get down to it. How would you like to tell the world about me — about us?"

"Well, I already —"

"I mean, the *truth* about us."

"From the evidence I already have —" Phillipso began with some heat. It cooled swiftly. Hurensohn's face had taken on an expression of unshakable patience; Phillipso was suddenly aware that he could rant and rave and command and explain from now until Michaelmas, and this creature would simply wait him out. He knew, too (though he kept it well below the conscious area) that the more he talked the more he would leave himself open to contradiction — the worst kind of contradiction at that: quotes from Phillipso. So he dried right up and tried the other tack. "All right," he said humbly. "Tell me."

"Ah . . ." It was a long-drawn-out sound, denoting deep satisfaction. "I think I'll begin by informing you that you have, quite without knowing it, set certain forces in motion which can profoundly affect mankind for hundreds, even thousands of years."

"Hundreds," breathed Phillipso, his eye beginning to glow. "Even thousands."

"That is not a guess," said Hurensohn. "It's a computation. And the effect you have on your cultural matrix is — well, let me draw an analogy from your own recent history. I'll quote something: '*Long had part of the idea; McCarthy had the other part. McCarthy got nowhere, failed with his third party, because he attacked and destroyed but didn't* give. *He appealed to hate, but not to greed, no what's-in-it-for-me, no pork-chops.*' That's from the works of a reformed murderer who now writes reviews for the New York *Herald Tribune*."

"What has this to do with me?"

"You," said Hurensohn, "are the Joseph McCarthy of saucer-writers."

Phillipso's glow increased. "My," he sighed.

"And," said Hurensohn, "you may profit by his example. If that be — no, I've quoted enough. I see you are not getting my drift, anyway. I shall be more explicit. We came here many years ago to study your interesting little civilization. It shows great promise — so great that we have decided to help you."

"Who needs help?"

"Who needs help?" Hurensohn paused for a long time, as if he had sent away somewhere for words and was waiting for them to arrive. Finally, "I take it back. I won't be more explicit. If I explained myself in detail I would only sound corny. Any rephrasing of the Decalogue sounds corny to a human being. Every statement of every way in which you need help has been said and said. You are cursed with a sense of rejection, and your rejection begets anger and your anger begets crime and your crime begets guilt; and all

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your guilty reject the innocent and destroy their innocence. Riding this wheel you totter and spin, and the only basket in which you can drop your almighty insecurity is an almighty fear, and anything that makes the basket bigger is welcome to you. . . . Do you begin to see what I am talking about, and why I'm talking to you?

"Fear is your business, your stock in trade. You've gotten fat on it. With humanity trembling on the edge of the known, you've found a new unknown to breed fear in. And this one's a honey; it's infinite. Death from space . . . and every time knowledge lights a brighter light and drives the darkness back, you'll be there to show how much wider the circumference of darkness has become. . . . Were you going to say something?"

"I am *not* getting fat," said Phillipso.

"Am I saying anything?" breathed the sandy-haired man. "Am I here at all?"

In all innocence Phillipso pointed out, "You said you weren't."

Hurensohn closed his eyes and said in tones of sweet infinite patience, "Listen to me, Phillipso, because I now fear I shall never speak to you again. Whether or not you like it — and you do, and we don't — you have become the central clearinghouse for the Unidentified Aerial Object. You have accomplished this by lies and by fear, but that's now beside the point — you accomplished it. Of all countries on earth, this is the only one we can effectively deal with; the other so-called Great Powers are constitutionally vindictive, or impotent, or hidebound, or all three. Of all the people in this country we could deal with — in government, or the great foundations, or the churches — we can find no one who could overcome the frenzy and foolishness of your following. You have forced us to deal with you."

"My," said Phillipso.

"Your people listen to you. More people than you know listen to your people — frequently without knowing it themselves. You have something for everyone on earth who feels small, and afraid, and guilty. You tell them they are right to be afraid, and that makes them proud. You tell them that the forces ranged against them are beyond their understanding, and they find comfort in each other's ignorance. You say the enemy is irresistible, and they huddle together in terror and are unanimous. And at the same time you except your self, implying that you and you alone can protect them."

"Well," said Phillipso, "if you have to deal with me . . . isn't it so?"

"It is not," said Hurensohn flatly. "'*Protect*' presupposes '*attack*.' There is no attack. We came here to help."

"Liberate us," said Phillipso.

"Yes. *No!*" For the first time Hurensohn showed a sign of irritation. "Don't go leading me into

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your snide little rat-shrewd pitfalls, Phillipso! By liberate I meant make free; what you meant is what the Russians did to the Czechs."

"All right," said Phillipso guardedly. "You want to free us. Of what?"

"War. Disease. Poverty. Insecurity."

"Yes," said Phillipso. "It's corny."

"You don't believe it."

"I haven't thought about it one way or the other yet," said Phillipso candidly. "Maybe you can do all you say. What is it you want from me?"

Hurensohn held up his hands. Phillipso blinked as *The Man Who Saved the Earth* appeared in one of them and *We Need not Surrender* in the other. He then realized that the actual volumes must be in the ship. Some of his incipient anger faded; some of his insipid pleasure returned. Hurensohn said, "These. You'll have to retract."

"What do you mean retract?"

"Not all at once. You're going to write another book, aren't you? Of course; you'd have to." There was the slightest emphasis on "*you'd*" and Phillipso did not like it. However, he said nothing. Hurensohn went on: "You could make new discoveries. Revelations, if you like. Interpretations."

"I couldn't do that."

"You'd have all the help in the world. Or out of it."

"Well, but what for?"

"To draw the poison of those lies of yours. To give us a chance to show ourselves without getting shot on sight."

"Can't you protect yourselves against that?"

"Against the bullets, certainly. Not against what pulls the triggers."

"Suppose I do go along with you."

"I told you! No poverty, no insecurity, no crime, no —"

"No Phillipso."

"Oh. You mean, what's in it for you? Can't you see? You'd make possible a new Eden, the flowering of your entire specie — a world where men laughed and worked and loved and achieved, where a child could grow up unafraid and where, for the first time in your history, human beings would understand one another when they spoke. You could do this — just you."

"I can see it," said Phillipso scathingly. "All the world on the village green and me with them, leading a morris dance. I couldn't live that way."

"You're suddenly very cocky, Mister Phillipso," said Hurensohn with a quiet and frightening courtesy.

Phillipso drew a deep breath. "I can afford to be," he said harshly. "I'll level with you, bogey man." He laughed unpleasantly. "Good, huh. Bogey. That's what they call you when they — "

"— get us on a radar screen. I know, I know. Get to the point."

"Well. All right then. You asked for it." He got to his feet. "You're a

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phony. You can maybe do tricks with mirrors, maybe even hide the mirrors, but that's it. If you could do a tenth of what you say, you wouldn't have to come begging. You'd just . . . do it. You'd just walk in and take over. By God, I would."

"You probably would," said Hurensohn, with something like astonishment. No, it was more like an incredulous distaste. He narrowed his eyes. For a brief moment Phillipso thought it was part of his facial expression, or the beginning of a new one, and then he realized it was something else, a concentration, a —

He shrieked. He found himself doing something proverbial, unprintable, and not quite impossible. He didn't want to do it — with all his mind and soul he did not want to, but he did it nonetheless.

"If and when I want you to," said Hurensohn calmly, "you'll do that in the window of Bullock's Wilshire at high noon."

"Please . . ."

"I'm not doing anything," said Hurensohn. He laughed explosively, put his hands in his jacket pockets, and — worst of all, he watched. "Go to it, boy."

"*Please!*" Phillipso whimpered.

Hurensohn made not the slightest detectible move, but Phillipso was suddenly free. He fell back into his chair, sobbing with rage, fear, and humiliation. When he could find a word at all, it came out between the fingers laced over his scarlet face, and was, "Inhuman. That was . . . inhuman."

"Uh-huh," agreed Hurensohn pleasantly. He waited until the walls of outrage expanded enough to include him, recoil from him, and return to the quivering Phillipso, who could then hear when he was spoken to. "What you've got to understand," said Hurensohn, "is that we don't do what we can do. We can, I suppose, smash a planet, explode it, drop it into the sun. You can, in that sense, eat worms. You don't, though, and wouldn't. In your idiom you *couldn't*. Well then, neither can we force humanity into anything without its reasoned consent. You can't understand that, can you? Listen: I'll tell you just how far it goes. We couldn't force even *one* human to do what we want done. You, for example."

"Y-you just did, though."

Hurensohn shuddered — a very odd effect, rather like that on a screen when one thumps a slide-projector with the heel of one's hand. "A demonstration, that's all. Costly, I may add. I won't get over it as soon as you will. To make a point, you might say, I had to eat a bedbug." Again the flickering shudder. "But then, people have gone farther than that to put an idea over."

"I could refuse?" Phillipso said, timidly.

"Easily."

"What would you do to me?"

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"Nothing."

"But you'd go ahead and —"

Hurensohn was shaking his head as soon as Phillipso began to speak. "We'd just go. You've done too much damage. If you won't repair it, there's no way for us to do it unless we use force, and we can't do that. It seems an awful waste, though. Four hundred years of observation. . . . I wish I could tell you the trouble we've gone to, trying to watch you, *learn* you, without interfering. Of course, it's been easier since Kenneth Arnold and the noise he made about us."

"Easier?"

"Lord, yes. You people have a talent — really, a genius for making rational your unwillingness to believe your own eyes. We got along famously after the weather-balloon hypothesis was made public. It's so easy to imitate a weather balloon. Pokey, though. The greatest boon of all was that nonsense about temperature inversions. It's quite a trick to make a ship behave like automobile headlights on a distant mountain or the planet Venus, but temperature inversions?" He snapped his fingers. "Nothing to it. Nobody understands 'em so they explain everything. We thought we had a pretty complete tactical manual on concealment, but did you see the one the U. S. Air Force got out? Bless 'em! It even explains the mistakes we make. Well, most of them, anyway. That idiot in Loch Ness —"

"Wait, wait!" Phillipso wailed. "I'm trying to find out what I'm supposed to do, what will happen, and you sit there and go *on* so!"

"Yes, yes of course. You're quite right. I was just blowing words over my tongue to try to get the taste of you out of my mouth. Not that I really have a mouth, and that would make a tongue sort of frustrated, wouldn't it? Figure of speech, you know."

"Tell me again. This Paradise on earth — how long is it supposed to take? How would you go about it?"

"Through your next book, I suppose. We'd have to work out a way to counteract your other two without losing your audience. If you jump right into line and say how friendly and wise we aliens are, the way Adamski and Heard did, you'll only disappoint your followers. I know! I'll give you a weapon against these — uh — bogeymen of yours. A simple formula, a simple field generator. We'll lay it out so anyone can use it, and bait it with some of your previous nonsense — beg pardon, I might have meant some of your previous statements. Something guaranteed to defend Earth against the — uh — World Destroyers." He smiled. It was rather a pleasant sight. "It would, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if we claimed that the device had an effective range of fifty feet and it actually covered, say, two thousand square miles, and it was easy and cheap to build, and the plans were in every copy of your

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new book . . . let's see now, we'd have to pretend to violate a little security, too, so the people who aren't afraid would think they were stealing . . . hmmm."

"Device, device — *what* device?"

"Oh, a —" Hurensohn came up out of his reverie. "Labeling again, dammit. I'll have to think a minute. You have no name for such a thing."

"Well, what is it supposed to do?"

"Communicate. That is, it makes complete communications possible."

"We get along pretty well."

"Nonsense! You communicate with labels — words. Your words are like a jumble of packages under a Christmas tree. You know who sent each one and you can see its size and shape, and sometimes it's soft or it rattles or ticks. But that's all. You don't know *exactly* what it means and you won't until you open it. That's what this device will do — open your words to complete comprehension. If every human being, regardless of language, age or background, understood exactly what every other human being wanted, and knew at the same time that he himself was understood, it would change the face of the earth. Overnight."

Phillipso sat and thought that one out. "You couldn't bargain," he said at length. "You couldn't — uh — explain a mistake, even."

"You could explain it," said Hurensohn. "It's just that you couldn't excuse it."

"You mean every husband who — ah — flirted, every child who played hooky, every manufacturer who —"

"All that."

"Chaos," whispered Phillipso. "The very structure of —"

Hurensohn laughed pleasantly. "You know what you're saying, Phillipso. You're saying that the basic structure of your whole civilization is lies and partial truths, and that without them it would fall apart. And you're quite right." He chuckled again. "Your Temple of Space, just for example. What do you think would happen to it if all your sheep knew what their Shepherd was and what was in the shepherd's mind?"

"What are you trying to do — tempt me with all this?"

Most gravely Hurensohn answered him, and it shocked Phillipso to the marrow when he used his first name to do it. "I am, Joe, with all my heart I am. You're right about the chaos, but such a chaos should happen to mankind or any species like it. I will admit that it would strike civilization like a mighty wind, and that a great many structures would fall. But there would be no looters in the wreckage, Joe. No man would take advantage of the ones who fell."

"I know something about human beings," Phillipso said in a flat, hurt voice. "And I don't want 'em on the prowl when I'm down. Especially when they don't have anything. God."

Hurensohn shook his head sadly. "You don't know enough, then.

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You have never seen the core of a human being, a part which is not afraid, and which understands and is understood." Hurensohn searched his face with earnest eyes.

"Have you?"

"I have. I see it now. I see it in you all. But then, I see more than you do. You could see as much; you all could. Let me do it, Joe. Help me. Help me, *please*."

"And lose everything I've worked so hard to —"

"Lose? Think of the gain! Think of what you'd do for the whole world! Or — if it means any more to you — turn the coin over. Think of what you'll carry with you if you don't help us. Every war casualty, every death from preventable disease, every minute of pain in every cancer patient, every stumbling step of a multiple sclerosis victim, will be on your conscience from the moment you refuse me.

"Ah, think, Joe — *think!*"

Phillipso slowly raised his eyes from his clenched hands to Hurensohn's plain, intense face. Higher, then, to the dome and through it. He raised his hand and pointed. "Pardon me," he said shakily, "but your ship is showing."

"Pshaw," said Hurensohn surprisingly. "Dammit, Phillipso, you've gone and made me concentrate, and I've let go the warp-matrix and fused my omicron. Take a minute or two to fix. I'll be back."

And he disappeared. He didn't go anywhere; he just abruptly wasn't.

Josephus MacArdle Phillipso moved like a sleepwalker across the round room and stood against the plexiglas, staring up and out at the shining ship. It was balanced and beautiful, dusty-textured and untouchable like a moth's wing. It was lightly phosphorescent, flaring in the orange glow of the slashing searchlight, dimming rapidly almost to blackness just as the light cut at it again.

He looked past the ship to the stars, and in his mind's eye, past them to stars again, and stars, and whole systems of stars which in their remoteness looked like stars again, and stars again. He looked down then, to the ground under the Temple and down again to its steep slope, its one narrow terrace of a highway, and down and down again to the lamp-speckled black of the valley bottom. And if I fell from here to there, he thought, it would be like falling from crest to trough in the whorls of a baby's fingerprint.

And he thought, even with help from Heaven, I couldn't tell this truth and be believed. I couldn't suggest this work and be trusted. I am unfit, and I have unfit myself.

He thought bitterly, it's only the truth. The truth and I have a like polarity, and it springs away from me when I approach, by a law of nature. I prosper without the truth, and it has cost me nothing, nothing, nothing but the ability to tell the truth.

But I might try, he thought.

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What was it he said: *The core of a human being, a part which is not afraid, and which understands and is understood.* Who was he talking about? Anybody I know? Anyone I ever heard of? ("How are you?" you say, when you don't care how they are. "I'm sorry," you say, when you're not. "Goodby," you say, and it means God be with you, and how often is your goodby a blessing? Hypocrisy and lies, thousands a day, so easily done we forget to feel guilty for them.)

I see it now, he said, though. Did he mean me? Could he see the core of me, and say that? . . . if he can see such a marrow, he can see a strand of spider-silk at sixty yards.

He said, Phillipso recalled, that if I wouldn't help, they'd do nothing. They'd go away, that's all — go away, forever, and leave us at the mercy of — what was that sardonic phrase? — the World Destroyers.

"But I never lied!" he wailed, suddenly and frighteningly loud. "I never meant to. They'd ask, don't you see, and I'd only say yes or no, whatever they wanted to hear. The only other thing I ever did was to explain the yes, or the no; they didn't start out to be lies!"

No one answered him. He felt very alone. He thought again, I could try . . . and then, wistfully, could I try?

The phone rang. He looked blindly at it until it rang again. Tiredly he crossed to it and picked it up. "Phillipso."

The phone said, "Okay, Swami, you win. How did you do it?"

"Who is that? Penfield?" Penfield, whose original Phillipso spread had started his rise from Sunday feature writer; Penfield, who, as district chief of a whole newspaper chain, had of course long since forsworn Phillipso . . .

"Yeah, Penfield," drawled the pugnacious, insulting voice. "Penfield who promised you faithfully that never again would these papers run a line about you and your phony space war."

"What do you want, Penfield?"

"So you win, that's all. Whether I like it or not, you're news again. We're getting calls from all over the county. There's a flight of F-84's on the way from the Base. There's a TV mobile unit coming up the mountain to get that flying saucer of yours on network, and four queries already from INS. I don't know how you're doing it, but you're news, so what's your lousy story?"

Phillipso glanced up over his shoulder at the ship. The orange searchlight set it to flaming once, once again, while the telephone urgently bleated his name. Around came the light, and —

And nothing. It was gone. The ship was gone. "Wait!" cried Phillipso hoarsely. But it was gone.

The phone gabbled at him. Slowly he turned back to it. "Wait," he said to it too. He put down the instrument and heeled water out of his eyes with the balls of his thumbs.

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Then he picked up the phone again.

"I saw from here," said the tinny voice. "It's gone. What was it? What'd you do?"

"Ship," said Phillipso. "It was a spaceship."

"'*It was a spaceship*,'" Penfield repeated in the voice of a man writing on a pad. "So come on, Phillipso. What happened? Aliens came down and met you face to face, that it?"

"They — yes."

"'*Face . . . to . . . face.*' Got it. What'd they want?" A pause, then, angrily, "Phillipso, you there? Dammit, I got a story to get out here. What'd they want? They beg for mercy, want you to lay off?"

Phillipso wet his lips. "Well, yes. Yes, they did."

"What'd they look like?"

"I — they . . . there was only one."

Penfield growled something about pulling teeth. "All right, only one. One *what*? Monster, spider, octopus — come *on*, Phillipso!"

"It . . . well, it wasn't a man, exactly."

"A girl," said Penfield excitedly. "A girl of unearthly beauty. How's that? They've threatened you before. Now they came to beguile you with, and so on. How's that?"

"Well, I —"

"I'll quote you. '*Unearthly . . .* mmm . . . *and refused . . .* mmm, *temptation.*'"

"Penfield, I —"

"Listen, Swami, that's all you get. I haven't time to listen to any more of your crap. I'll give you this in exchange, though. Just a friendly warning, and besides, I want this story to hold up through tomorrow anyhow. ATIC and the FBI are going to be all over that Temple of yours like flies on a warm marshmallow. You better hide the pieces of that balloon or whatever else the trick was. When it reaches the point of sending out a flight of jets, they don't think publicity is funny."

"Penfield, I —" But the phone was dead. Phillipso hung up and whirled to the empty room. "You *see*?" he wept. "You see what they make me do?"

He sat down heavily. The phone rang again. New York, the operator said. It was Jonathan, his publisher. "Joe! Your line's been busy. Great work, fella. Heard the bulletin on TV. How'd you do it? Never mind. Give me the main facts. I'll have a release out first thing in the morning. Hey, how soon can you get the new book done? Two weeks? Well, three — you can do it in three, fella. You have to do it in three. I'll cancel the new Heming — or the — never mind, I'll get press time for it. Now. Let's have it. I'll put you on the recorder."

Phillipso looked out at the stars. From the telephone, he heard the first sharp high *beep* of the recording machine. He bent close to it, breathed deeply, and said, "Tonight I was visited by aliens. This was no accidental contact like my first one; they planned this one. They came

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to stop me — not with violence, not by persuasion, but with — uh — the ultimate weapon.

"A girl of unearthly beauty appeared amidst the coils and busbars of my long-range radar. I —"

From behind Philippso came a sound, soft, moist, explosive — the exact reproduction of someone too angry, too disgusted to speak, but driven irresistibly to spit.

Phillipso dropped the telephone and whirled. He thought he saw the figure of a sandy-haired man, but it vanished. He caught the barest flicker of something in the sky where the ship had been, but not enough really to identify; then it was gone too.

"I was on the phone," he whimpered. "I had too much on my mind, I thought you'd gone, I didn't know you'd just fixed your warp-whatever-you-call-it, I didn't mean, I was going to, I —"

At last he realized he was alone. He had never been so alone. Absently he picked up the telephone and put it to his ear. Jonathan was saying excitedly, ". . . and the title. *The Ultimate Weapon.* Cheesecake pic of the girl coming out of the radar, nekkid. The one thing you haven't used yet. We'll *bomb* 'em, boy. Yeah, and you resisting, too. Do wonders for your Temple. But get busy on that book, hear? Get it to me in fifteen days and you can open your own branch of the U. S. mint."

Slowly, without speaking or waiting to see if the publisher was finished, Phillipso hung up. Once, just once, he looked out at the stars, and for a terrible instant each star was a life, a crippled limb, a faulty heart, a day of agony; and there were millions on countless millions of stars, and some of the stars were galaxies of stars; by their millions, by their flaming megatons, they were falling on him now and would fall on him forever.

He sighed and turned away, and switched on the light over his typewriter. He rolled in a sandwich of bond, carbon, second-sheet, centered the carriage, and wrote

THE ULTIMATE WEAPON

by

Josephus MacArdle Phillipso.

Facile, swift, deft, and dedicated, he began to write.

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Like every other human experience, it took different forms in retrospect, depending (as always) on how it directly affected the person concerned. This is the way it seemed to the boy, because it was his birthday.

The Last Present

by WILL STANTON

I LEFT THE HOUSE ABOUT TEN o'clock that morning. I had leather puttees over my hiking breeches, and a knapsack for my lunch, and my field glasses in a case slung over my shoulder. The hand-ax and knife and canteen were fastened to my belt — my mother kidded me about that.

"Do you expect one belt to hold up all that and your pants, too?" she said. "That's asking a lot."

I didn't make any excuses. After all she'd bought me most of the stuff herself.

"I want you back by four," she said; "I've got something I want you to do. That's four o'clock sharp, now, not any later and not any earlier." I had a pretty good idea what it was all about, after all it was my birthday. But neither of us let on. I went down the front steps and out to the street.

It was pretty quiet for a Saturday morning — a couple of people in their front yards raking leaves, but none of the kids around. I walked half way down the block and went into the alley and across the field in back of Pokey Michael's house. Pokey was my best friend. We'd done a lot of exploring together and hiking up the mountain, and we had plans for building a boat as soon as we got time for it.

I crossed the creek and started on the trail up the mountain. Ordinarily Pokey would have been going with me and probably some other friends, but this Saturday they had all made some kind of excuse. I was pretty sure I'd be seeing most of them back at my house around four o'clock. Almost every year my folks had some kind of surprise for my birthday, and I thought this time it would probably be a barbecue in the back yard for all my friends, and of course cake and ice cream and favors.

I got to Rocky Ridge just twenty-eight minutes after I'd left the house by my watch. I'd done it in better time before, but I wasn't trying to set any records. From

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there I could see a good bit of town — the roofs, anyway. You couldn't see my roof, or Pokey's — too many trees, but you could see Spud Ashley's roof and the window of his room. With field glasses you could even send semaphore signals back and forth — we planned to learn the code some day.

When I'd rested a minute, I hit the trail again for the steepest part of the climb. It was scrub oak through there and heavy underbrush so you couldn't see twenty feet to either side. All the time I was climbing I kept thinking about my birthday present — it was going to be a rifle I was pretty sure. Not an air rifle, I'd had one of those for years, but a real one, a .22.

The main reason I thought I was going to get it was the way my folks joked about giving me something else. "You're so crazy about hiking and camping," my mother said, "you ought to have something you could use outdoors. Like woolen underwear."

"That's no present," my dad said. "He'd rather have something from a hardware store — maybe something that would help him earn some spending money. What I had in mind was a lawn mower." Just as if I couldn't have borrowed one if I wanted to. No, I felt that if I wasn't going to get the rifle they wouldn't have joked about it.

Finally I came to the place where our special trail began. We'd blazed a tree to mark it, or actually what we'd done was blaze a tree up the path a ways. You'd start at the tree and come back fifty paces and head to the right, only we'd made it a rule never to leave the trail twice in the same place so as to make a path anybody else could follow. Each time we'd take a little different route until we came to a big rock out of sight of the main trail and that's where our secret trail really began. We'd cut it through the thick brush, and after a couple hundred yards it led to a cave that nobody outside our club had ever seen. Of course the mountain was full of caves, probably some that had never been discovered, but this was our special one.

Looking through the brush in front of it you could see Rocky Ridge. What that meant was that we had a communication system with the whole town. Say Spud was home, he could get a telephone call from one of the other fellows and semaphore the call to the Ridge. Then whoever was there could relay the message to the cave. That way if any other gang of kids from town tried to sneak up on us or anything, they wouldn't have much luck.

I built a fire and fixed my lunch. I had a can of spaghetti I cooked in my mess kit, and a banana and cupcakes and water from my canteen. After lunch I rolled a corn-silk cigarette. We had agreed that none of us in the society would ever use tobacco until we'd finished high school, but if anyone wanted to have

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a corn-silk smoke after a meal it was relaxing, and we didn't see how it could do any harm.

Usually from the cave you could hear the train whistle at 2:10, but that afternoon I missed it. I didn't think my watch could be far off — I had it regulated so it only gained five minutes a week but that day I didn't hear the train whistle. At 2:30 I made sure the fire was out and cleaned up camp. That gave me plenty of time to take it easy going down the trail and still get home by 4:00. It had been a good day — warm for October, and not much wind. I got to the Ridge by 3:20 and stopped for a minute to rest and take a look around. It was quiet. Generally on a Saturday you could hear the noise of horns and traffic from down town, but there wasn't a sound. Only bird calls and rustling in the underbrush, but nothing mechanical or human. Ordinarily you're so used to human sounds you don't even hear them. But when they stop you notice it. You can tell right away. I didn't wait any longer — I started down the trail again, walking fast.

I crossed the creek and started running through the field in back of Pokey's and up the alley to the street. Then I stopped. The street was the same as in the morning — I mean the houses and trees. But there weren't any people in sight and there was something else — something crazy. It was furniture. All along the street, in front of every house there was a table or stand of some kind, with guns piled on them. It was like all the people had gone through their houses and taken every gun and knife and weapon and piled them out front for the garbage man or somebody to pick up. But why would they do it — and all at the same time? I stood there for a minute or more just looking up and down the street. Then I heard the first noise.

It was coming from an empty car parked across the street. Somebody had left the radio going and there was a man's voice. I couldn't make out what he was saying, it was too hard to understand. But he seemed to be giving orders — telling people what to do.

I stood there watching the car for a minute and then I heard the other sound — the tapping. Like somebody trying to get my attention and then waiting and then starting again. I whirled around. It was Pokey's father crouched behind their front window, tapping on the glass. He had been light-heavyweight champ of the Marines, so Pokey said, but he looked old and small. He was motioning me not to come any closer. I couldn't tell where Pokey was, or his mother, or anybody else on the block. I was all alone.

Then all I knew was I was running. With my knapsack and field-glasses bouncing up and down and the canteen slapping against my leg. I had to get home whatever happened. Ten houses to go — it seemed

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to take forever. Then I was crashing through the hedge and across the lawn and up the steps. The last thing I saw — the last thing I remember was our card table set up on the grass with a gun on it. A new one — a rifle — a .22.

I've told the story I don't know how many times now, at night when we lie on our bunks talking in whispers. Then I tell them about the hike and the cooking lunch and so on. All it amounted to was kid stuff, but they want me to tell it, over and over. It's because I had those few hours, I guess, when I was still free to do as I pleased after everyone else knew.

It's what I think about more than anything else. Whenever I wake up I keep my eyes closed for a minute to see if I can smell pine needles and hear the train whistle — the 2:10 train. Then I'll know I just dozed off after lunch and I can go down the trail and they'll be waiting for me — Pokey and my folks with the birthday party and all.

The light is coming in the windows, turning the walls and ceiling gray, and another day is started. A lot of them here have given up — they say there's nothing left to hope for. Maybe they're right, but I keep waiting.

Someday I'll hear the train whistle, and then all this will be over and I can go home.

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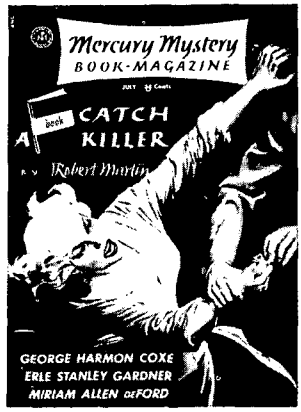

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